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# TNTESOL Journal

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## Call for Papers

TNTESOL Journal  
Volume 2 Fall 2009

The Editorial Board of the TNTESOL Journal seeks articles of general interest on any aspect of the teaching of English as a second or foreign language in elementary, middle high school, college/university, or adult/immigrant education. Our theme for the second edition will continue to be "Connecting Research and Practice." The topics can be varied and wide-ranging.

Articles should be no longer than twelve pages, double-spaced, or no more than 4000 words. Sections entitled "Classroom Practices" and "Book Reviews" will allow a maximum of 1500 words. Articles should follow APA style format, use nonsexist language, and have bibliographic references for all citations or works referred to in the body of the article.

*Important note: All articles must be submitted electronically.*

To submit your article electronically, please do the following:

1. Write and save the article as a Microsoft Word document.
2. Submit your paper as an attachment to an email in which you provide the following in the body of the email: your name, address, home phone number, school affiliation, email address, and title of the paper. Include a statement that your work has not been printed elsewhere and is not currently submitted elsewhere.
3. Email to [tsdalle@memphis.edu](mailto:tsdalle@memphis.edu) and include the words "TNTESOL-J Submission" in the subject heading. You will be notified immediately by return email once the article is received.

*Note: We accept articles year-round. Deadline for submission for fall publication: March 30, 2009.*

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## Editor's Comments: In This Issue

Teresa Dalle  
Editor

On the way to putting together our first TNTESOL Journal, something interesting happened. A topic for the first issue evolved naturally through the interests and the research of the authors. Although the editorial board had proposed that the first volume be a compilation of articles on various topics, the articles selected fell into a pattern. The first issue became one that might be entitled "Generating Usable Knowledge." The articles, bringing research and practice together, give shape to a journal that is truly a tribute to TNTESOL's "Celebrating 30 Years."

Beverly Hearn, who was the force behind launching a journal for the TNTESOL affiliate, first suggested the idea of a journal for TNTESOL while serving as its president in 2005-06. She welcomes all to the first edition in her editorial and makes a plea for university researchers to work closely with classroom practitioners to better serve the needs of the field of ESL. Beverly Hearn now serves on the editorial board of the journal.

This first edition of the journal really does demonstrate that practical knowledge and its application is rooted in theoretical assumptions and research findings. A good example is Wolfe and Gilrane's article. In it, assessment takes on a more personal look as Wolfe documents her personal journey as a teacher to formulate assessments that help in documenting student progress throughout the acquisition process. In doing so, Wolfe familiarized herself with the list of standards for reading and writing developed by the International Reading Association (IRA) and the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE). She then developed her own assessment system comprising three main components: anecdotal records, documentation of student progress, and student reflection. Her paper describes in detail each part and reports on results.

Carolyn LaVon Bridges' article reports on Reader's Theater, a teaching strategy in which literature is adapted into scripts which students read aloud. Bridges questioned whether such a technique might help the oral language and reading skills of ELLs, and her research led to this paper, which presents her findings. Those findings may prove helpful for ESL teachers seeking ways to encourage oral reading in a relaxed and motivating environment.

Learning strategies and their role in acquiring and using language and developing reading skills are the topics of three of the articles. Focusing on the positive educational effects of playing videogames, Lee and Key, stress that in order to play the games, students need to be aware of language use, and, in order to succeed, they make use of various learning strategies. They note a gender difference in choice of strategies also. The point here is that teachers can use something students find enjoyable as a means of helping them develop language skills and strategies for learning.

Chen's article reports on research in which several hundred students in Taiwan were asked to identify which learning strategies they used most often. Chen then divided

the informants into two groups—those who had passed the GEPT, General English Proficiency Test, and those who had not passed. She then looked at the different strategy use of each group. Her findings supported earlier research that showed that successful students used various specific strategies.

Tying together the issues of strategy and reading, Hearn's article covers three reading strategies used for native speakers but especially helpful for ELLs: possible sentences, cubing, and anticipation guide. Hearn describes each strategy and the particular skills each addresses.

Dana Siegel's article on sight words reminds teachers that within the discussion of best practices in teaching literacy, there is an important skill that should not be overlooked and that helps all beginning readers—mastering sight words. The article argues that ELLs especially benefit from becoming fluent readers of sight words. It also provides some practical and easily implemented strategies for getting students to recognize and use sight words and sight phrases.

Teachers always welcome research that supports classroom practices that they intuitively feel are beneficial. Michieka's article on the use of songs in the university classroom does that. Not only does she provide support for the benefits of using songs in language classrooms, she also gives advice about choosing songs and provides a very helpful sample lesson plan.

Two articles address the concerns of how to deliver services to ELLs. Betty Thomason provides an answer to a dilemma of many rural schools, who must often serve small numbers of ELLs spread out in a large county and of varying ages and abilities. The answer for her school district was "clustering." Her article provides an overview of clustering and its benefits.

Wendy Wilson also describes a means of accommodating ELLs--a Newcomers' Program. Her description of the program in Nashville explains the purpose and goals, the concerns and issues, and the potential success of such programs. Those school districts receiving students with no English and little or no academic background would especially benefit from considering such a program.

Finally, Sams' review on *Leadership in English Language Teaching* provides a good overview of the book, which explains and describes various leadership skills needed in diverse contexts. Sams summarizes some main points of the book, which covers various leadership skills, strategies, and resources for ESL specialists. She finds that the book offers something for everyone, from K-12 ESL teachers to affiliate presidents.

The contributors to this first edition have shared their findings, both in research and in classroom practice. They successfully demonstrate how research and practice can come together for "usable knowledge."

## Editorial

Beverly Hearn

The spotlight for this first issue of the *Tennessee TESOL Journal* is on classroom practice. Our research articles provide insight into the validity of specific classroom practices with English language learners. Our regular articles center on sharing the good work that is going on in Tennessee classrooms. And this is only natural for Tennessee TESOLers to focus on the most effective ways to get the job done: we are the Volunteer State, after all. In Tennessee TESOL, we have a vital and growing organization of ELL professionals, predominantly public school K-12 ESL educators. We have a hardworking, talented, organization and membership who have risen to the call to help the influx of ELL learners to adjust and, in reality, to compete academically in Tennessee public school classrooms.

As we celebrated TNTESOL's 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year, we looked back and remembered the fact that TNTESOL was founded by the academicians, especially those involved in Intensive English Programs. Today, thirty years later, the university and public school educators have effectively joined hands, and much of the higher education work done in ESL in the state at this point ties intimately to the public schools. Our colleagues in Tennessee universities and colleges are stretching their creative capacities and designing innovative programs to meet the ever rising demand for new ELL teachers including traditional programs for initial and additional licensure, online programs, alternative programs such as Teach Tennessee, and grant funded licensure programs in the years when federal funding is available.

We are producing new teachers and we are managing to “man” the classrooms, but so far few of us in either the university or public sectors are striving to determine exactly how effective our classroom practices are. For public school educators, that question is even more relevant as the NCLB and accountability movements now in place show no signs of slowing. There is much work to be done in the area of effective classroom practice for English language learners. Indeed this is the situation for TESOL as a whole because it is a relatively new field in the process of development. Our Tennessee university colleagues have a distinct responsibility to engage in meaningful research on English Language Learners—and doubly so in view of the overwhelming interest in classroom practice exemplified by the many contributions on that topic in the inaugural issue of our *TNTESOL Journal*.

When we put all these factors together: The keen interest in effective classroom practice, the need for accountability and answers, the energetic and industrious membership of TNTESOL, the TESOL educators at Tennessee universities who work under the mandate to research and to publish, and, finally, a new publishing venue, the *TNTESOL Journal*, the answer is obvious. TNTESOL should nurture partnerships between the academic and practitioner ELL professionals, and we should focus on answering the question that TNTESOL members have expressed overwhelming interest in: What are the most effective classroom practices for teaching English language learners, both K-12 and in the Intensive English programs?

In Tennessee TESOL, we have the talent, the energy, the industry, and the desire to research effective ELL instructional practices. To make this happen, public school educators and university educators need to seek partnerships for research purposes. Let's organize what we are doing to make sure that there is not too much overlap in the specific practices being researched. Form questions that both practitioners and academics want to research. Institutional Review Board Approval needs to be obtained. The university side of the equation can invest heavily in the design and background of the study while public school partners collect data and assist in interpretation. Both partners can co-author and edit the research reports and send them to our *TNTESOL Journal* editor for evaluation and review for inclusion in our next issue of the journal.

If we can answer some specific questions about effective classroom practices, Tennessee ELLs will reap the ultimate benefits by learning more efficiently and effectively in our ESL classrooms. The challenge has been laid before us. Let's step up to do the research and at the same time raise the quality of classroom practice for ELLs in Tennessee. If we succeed, the *TNTESOL Journal* could possibly become the “go to” journal for research about effective classroom practices.

## Assessment That Supports Student Learning: One Teacher's Journey

Jamie Wolfe and Colleen P. Gilrane

*Although teachers tend to emphasize student performance on standardized tests to determine placement in ELL programs and to identify student needs, these results are inadequate to help teachers prepare for daily instruction. Teachers get the scores on annual assessments months after having taught the students. This article reports on one teacher's use of a more systematic and comprehensive means of assessing the effectiveness of class instruction. The assessment uses models suggested in the available literature on literacy assessment.*

*Only extraordinary education is concerned with learning; most is concerned with achieving; and for young minds, these two are very nearly opposite. Marilyn French (as cited in Kohn, 2004, p. 28)*

In 1994, a joint task force formed by the International Reading Association (IRA) and the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) prepared a list of standards for the assessment of reading and writing. They are the following:

1. The interests of the students are paramount in assessment.
2. The primary purpose of assessment is to improve teaching and learning.
3. Assessment must reflect and allow for critical inquiry into curriculum and instruction.
4. Assessments must recognize and reflect the intellectually and socially complex nature of reading and writing and the important roles of school, home, and society in literacy development.
5. Assessment must be fair and equitable.
6. The consequences of an assessment procedure are the first, and most important, consideration in establishing the validity of the assessment.
7. The teacher is the most important agent of assessment.
8. The assessment process should involve multiple perspectives and sources of data.
9. Assessments must be based in the school community.
10. All members of the educational community – students, parents, teachers, administrators, policy makers, and the public – must have a voice in the development, interpretation, and reporting of assessment.
11. Parents must be involved as active, essential participants in the assessment process.

A complete classroom assessment system should strive to meet each of these standards. Therefore, the assessment system must have several components and be constantly monitored by the teacher.

The IRA and NCTE Joint Task Force on Assessment asserts that the “most powerful assessments for students are likely to be those that occur in the daily activity of the classroom” (1994, p.15). They suggest that teachers consider many different assessment texts from students, including “the pieces that students write, their responses to literature, the various assignments and projects they complete, the contributions they make to discussions, their behavior in different settings, the questions they ask in the classroom or in conferences, their performances or demonstrations involving language use, and tests of their language competence” (1994, p. 11).

Anecdotal records are one source of assessment that occurs within the “daily activity of the classroom” (IRA & NCTE, 1994, p. 15). Karen West (2005) writes about her success using them with her kindergarten students. She has developed a system of evaluating her students throughout the day, focusing on several students each day so that she observes each closely at least once a week. All of her information is organized into an evaluation binder that she uses to inform her instructional decisions. Similarly, Paul Boyd-Batstone (2005) recommends that teachers take anecdotal records about their students focusing on the standard addressed in the day’s lesson. He offers teachers guidelines for making anecdotal records: “Write observable data, use significant abbreviations, write records in the past tense, support records with examples as evidence, don’t use the C-word (can’t), and avoid redundancy” (2005, p. 172). Further, he suggests that teachers keep each student’s records on an adhesive label that is kept on an individual record sheet. About every six to eight weeks, teachers would analyze the records and make instructional recommendations for that student. Such narratives are enlightening for teachers, parents, and students. Narrative evaluations have been shown to produce better student growth than grades or a combination of grades and narratives (Kohn, 2004).

Taking anecdotal records meets the fourth and seventh standards set forth by the IRA and NCTE: “Assessments must recognize and reflect the intellectually and socially complex nature of reading and writing,” and “the teacher is the most important agent of assessment.”

Other rich sources for assessment data are reading and spelling inventories. Not only do they reveal students’ instructional levels, but they can also be used to document student growth. Paris and Carpenter (2005) state that one important use of informal reading inventories is “to document growth in children’s reading” (p. 191). However, Paris (2005) notes that it can be difficult to compare student growth when they read passages of varying difficulty. One solution he proposes to this dilemma is “to use the *same* texts during each test and to measure increases in reading rate, accuracy, fluency, comprehension, and retelling on the texts” (2005, p. 195).

Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, and Johnston (2004) assert that spelling inventories are “reliable and valid measures of what students know about words” (p. 36). In their book *Words Their Way*, they have included several spelling inventories that teachers can administer to students throughout the year. Each inventory comes with a scoring guide to help teachers analyze where students are on a “developmental continuum” (p. 37). This

is powerful information to guide instruction. Teachers can easily pinpoint in what area each student next needs instruction. These inventories can and should be used throughout the year to re-assess and document student growth. The authors recommend conducting spelling assessments three times throughout the year (p. 37).

Yet another powerful source for assessment data is the students themselves. As part of the first standard, the IRA and NCTE task force affirms that an assessment system should encourage students to reflect. In her book *When Learners Evaluate*, Jane Hansen (1998) describes how teachers in various settings engaged students in meaningful, deep reflection about their literacy through developing student portfolios. This process is a long one that requires dedication and patience, yet even some of the most reluctant students in the classes which Hansen observed achieved success. They became a part of the class community and chose to participate in literate tasks. Hansen defines evaluation as “the act of finding value in someone or something” (1998, p. 1). These portfolios help students find value in themselves and in their school work; they also help teachers find the value in all their students.

To help students begin to construct portfolios and to reflect on their literacy, Hansen (1998) and her colleagues used these guiding questions:

1. What do I do well?
2. What is the most recent thing I’ve learned to do?
3. What do I want to learn next in order to grow?
4. What will I do to accomplish this?
5. What might I use for documentation? (p. 39)

These questions aid students in analyzing their own learning.

Similarly, Courtney and Abodeeb (2005) describe how Abodeeb uses diagnostic-reflective portfolios in her second-grade class. The diagnostic section of Abodeeb’s portfolios includes her documentation about her students such as interviews, reading inventories, and anecdotal records. She teaches students to set goals (which are posted on their desks), save work samples, and to write reflections about their progress through modeling, conferences, and class discussion. By December, her students are ready to take their portfolios home and share with their parents.

### MY PERSONAL JOURNEY

*A test score, like a fever, is a symptom that demands more specific analysis of the problem. In this case, what is required is a more in-depth analysis of the strengths and needs of students who fail to meet standards and instructional plans that will meet their needs. (Valencia & Buly, 2005, p. 134)*

Although we tend to emphasize student performance on the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) and the English Language Development Assessment (ELDA) to determine placement in ELL programs and to identify student needs—these results are inadequate to help teachers prepare for daily instruction. In the past, I have been frustrated to see students’ scores on these annual assessments months after teaching occurred. By then, it was too late to address any needs revealed by the score reports, and I could not be sure what I had learned about my instruction and the students’

learning. As I was preparing to go back to school in 2006, I decided to be more systematic in assessing my effectiveness instructing my students. I needed to get a better understanding of exactly where each one was in their literacy development; I needed a comprehensive, ongoing assessment system. Therefore, I researched the professional literature, developed a plan, and began my journey. Using models from the available literature on literacy assessment, I designed my own assessment system with three main components: anecdotal records, documentation of student progress, and student reflection. I have now used and refined the system over the course of two school years as an itinerant teacher of ELL students.

### **Designing and Using the System**

#### ***Anecdotal Records***

*“Teaching is choosing the right skills based on an astute observation of the child’s needs.” (Graves, 2002, p. 2)*

In order to comply with the IRA and NCTE assessment standards, I knew I needed to make assessment a part of my regular teaching routine – something that occurred with instruction and not after it. The sooner I could assess a student’s progress, the sooner I could alter instruction to meet the student’s needs. Therefore, I began taking anecdotal records during my lessons. I looked for strategies the students were using when they were reading, words that caused them trouble, the nature of their discussion about a text, and how they wrote. For example,

1. Are they writing a complete composition?
2. Do they use describing words?
3. Can they revise and edit?
4. Do they use invented or conventional spelling?
5. How many phonemes can they represent with letters?
6. Do they follow writing conventions like leaving spaces between words?

I simply jotted down my observations on my lesson plans. I found that by writing a narrative record, I could better explain the complex nature of the students’ growth than I could with a grade or a check-off system.

Because I wanted to show that my students were making progress on the standards set forth by the state, I created a spreadsheet listing all of the state standards. (see Figure 1) Next to each standard are two columns for the two grading periods in the first semester. During my planning time or after school, I wrote my records on this spreadsheet, recording the observation next to the standard to which it related. This is somewhat similar to Boyd-Batstone’s (2005) focused anecdotal records system. At the end of each grading period, I analyzed the records to make notations on the student’s strengths and areas to strengthen followed by instructional recommendations for the next grading period. I kept these spreadsheets along with other assessment data in a folder for each student.

Making anecdotal records about my students has been eye-opening for me. I realized that I was watching so closely; I knew I was gaining a deeper understanding of my students’ literacy than I had with my former students. Since I recorded as many details as

Figure 1 List of state standards with columns for two grading periods.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

1st Grade ESL Standards

Period:		
Spelling Inventory:		
Reading Inventory:		
<b>Listening</b>		
1.L.1 Understand the purpose for listening, and demonstrates understanding of language functions (e.g., greetings, requests, offers of help, apologies).		
1.L.2 Listen attentively to the speaker for specific information.		
1.L.3 Listen attentively to the speaker for specific information and uses appropriate listening skills.		
1.L.4 Recognize the difference between formal and informal language.		
1.L.5 Understand and follows simple directions.		
1.L.6 Understand oral language to make predictions about oral reading		
1.L.7 Demonstrate understanding of everyday vocabulary, including singular and plural regular and irregular nouns and action verbs		
1.L.8 Demonstrate understanding of comparative and superlative adjectives, both regular and irregular		
1.L.9 Demonstrate understanding of spatial prepositions		
1.L.10 Recognize simple statements (SVO, SV, past, present, or future) made of words that are accurate descriptions of pictures (e.g., point to the picture that shows a girl riding a bicycle, or who rode a bike yesterday or who will ride a bike tomorrow		
1.L.11 Identify the main idea of a narrative.		

possible during the day, I was able to look back at my notes to identify patterns and see growth. Furthermore, it did not take away from my ability to instruct or to engage the students in literate tasks. I took notes as they read a book, wrote stories, talked to me, and sorted words. I did not have to spend scant planning time composing quizzes and tests or precious instructional time administering assessments. These records meet the IRA and NCTE's (1994) first and third standards of being non-invasive (p. 17-18) and occurring in the "daily activity of the classroom" (p. 15).

Writing the records was not always easy. In the beginning, I struggled to record notes while teaching larger, more active groups. To cope with this problem, I began pre-selecting two students in each group on whom to focus each day. I have found two to be a very manageable number for me to observe. My student records became more informative after I adopted this policy. I also tried to take one minute between lessons to jot down my impressions quickly before starting the next group. I noticed that if I waited—the details of what I had observed became fuzzy and the records I was able to write were unspecific and uninformative.

To allow me to take an even closer look at my students, I developed an assessment schedule where I concentrated on each student every two weeks. When it was time for me to assess a student, I was sure to observe that student closely that day. In addition to the anecdotal record, I took a running record, re-administered the pre-primer word list from the Qualitative Reading Inventory – 3 (see section entitled "Documenting Growth" below), or used the kindergarten checklist I developed based on the Tennessee ESL standards for kindergarten. After school each day, I analyzed the information and recorded it next to the related standard. This took about twenty to thirty minutes after school. The process allowed me to assess and record notes on thirty students in two weeks.

### ***Documenting Growth***

*My heart is singing for joy this morning. A miracle has happened! The light of understanding has shone upon my little pupil's mind, and behold, all things are changed. Anne Sullivan (as cited in Martin, 2003)*

In order to prove to myself, my students, and any interested administrators and parents that my students were making progress in their literacy learning and to meet the IRA and NCTE's eighth standard, "the assessment process should involve multiple perspectives and sources of data," I wanted some more "objective" proof to go along with my anecdotal records. I chose to record student growth through the use of the *Qualitative Reading Inventory – 3* (QRI – 3) (Leslie & Caldwell, 2001) and the spelling inventories from *Words Their Way* (Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton & Johnston, 2004).

During the first few days of school—while I was evaluating students for possible ELL services and working out a schedule with the classroom teachers—I met with each of my students individually to administer the QRI – 3. I began with the word list. As soon as the student scored instructional level, I pulled out all of the narrative passages at that level and asked the student to select a passage to read. Giving students a choice allowed them to select the story they were the most interested in or had the most background knowledge about. I asked the background questions, then asked students to read the story. I timed their oral reading—then asked the comprehension questions. Thus, I

found the students' frustration, instructional, and independent levels in oral reading and comprehension of narrative texts plus their fluency rate. I recorded this information at the top of the standard sheet I used for my anecdotal records.

For students not yet reading on the pre-primer level, I re-administered the word list again in October. If the student scored instructional level, I asked the student to go on to read a pre-primer narrative text. For students reading above this level, I waited to measure their reading growth.

In December, I administered the QRI – 3 again to all my students. First, I used the same text they had read in August so I could document their growth in word identification and comprehension. If the student had shown significant growth (moved from frustration or instructional level to independent level) on that text, I asked the student to read another narrative text at a higher level. Again, he or she was able to select which narrative to read. This information was also noted on top of the standard sheet for each student.

In addition to the reading inventory, I also administered a spelling inventory when I first started meeting with my students in August. I explained to them that it was important for me to see how they spell a word even if they thought it is wrong. For most of my students, I administered the primary spelling inventory. For a few of my more advanced students, I used the elementary spelling inventory. After administering the inventories, I completed the feature guide published in *Words Their Way*. This allowed me to calculate a numerical score which I recorded on the standard sheet for each student.

More importantly, completing the feature guide allowed me to place each student on the developmental spelling continuum. I began word study instruction with my students in the first area where they missed two or more spelling patterns. If I noticed a student mastering all of the patterns at a particular level during the course of instruction, I moved him or her to the next level. In December, I re-administered the spelling inventories to assess the students' growth and to check if my instruction was still on track with the students' needs. Again, this information was recorded at the top of each student's standard sheet for easy comparison.

### ***Student Reflection***

*When we start to ask for our students' evaluations, they often surprise us, and we realize how far we might have gone astray without their insights" (Hansen, 1998, p. 2).*

I realize that in order to be successful, my students need to be aware of their learning and the strategies they use. They will not learn as much if I am the only one analyzing and reflecting upon their work—they have to learn to do the same. Thus, my students developed portfolios. At the beginning of the year, I modeled how they could tell about themselves and share their favorite books in a portfolio. Following my example, the students wrote about themselves, brought pictures, and shared their favorite books. These became part of their portfolios. Throughout the year, the students sorted and saved some of their best work. At the end of each grading period, they wrote or dictated a reflection on their work, answering the questions:

Figure 2 First section of the progress report for one semester.

**ESL Progress Report**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Period: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ is good at:

\_\_\_\_\_ says:

Mrs. Wolfe says:

\_\_\_\_\_ needs to learn:

\_\_\_\_\_ says:

Mrs. Wolfe says:

Next period, \_\_\_\_\_ will do:

Student Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Why is this some of my best work?
2. What did I learn?
3. What do I want to learn next?

To connect the information I gleaned from anecdotal records with student reflection, I met with each student individually at the end of each grading period. I prepared my notes on their strengths, areas to strengthen, and instructional recommendations. Before I shared my assessment, however, I asked the students to think about what they have been doing in ELL class. I asked, “What have you learned? What are you good at?” I recorded their responses in the first section of their progress reports (see Figure 2). Then I told them what I had seen them do well – their strengths. I asked the students to share their impressions first to get a true idea of what they thought. I did not want to taint their reflections with my own by imposing my assessments on them first. In addition, I used simple language on my form to facilitate the students’ ability to respond and participate.

After discussing their strengths, I asked the students what they thought they needed to learn next to improve their reading and writing and recorded their responses. Next, I shared my assessments. Finally, I asked for their input on instructional recommendations, and we both signed the form.

In an attempt to address the tenth and eleventh IRA and NCTE standards (“All members of the educational community – students, parents, teachers, administrators, policy makers, and the public – must have a voice in the development, interpretation, and reporting of assessment,” and “parents must be involved as active, essential participants in the assessment process”), this form was copied to my students’ classroom teachers and sent home to their parents (translated when possible). Since the students participated in the creation of the report, it became an authentic text they could share with their parents at home.

Conferring about the progress report helped students to reflect and set goals. Although this was a start on self-reflection, I still wanted student reflection to be a more routine part of our ELL class. Therefore, I sometimes copied the front covers of books read in class. After completing the book, I asked the students to write a reflection about what they learned reading that book, answering the questions: “What did you learn? Did you like the book? Why?”

### ***How Has It Been Working?***

My assessment system follows many of the IRA and NCTE’s assessment standards. In this section, I will discuss how it has been working so far by giving examples from each of the standards, referring to three of my students by the pseudonyms Jonathan, Miguel, and Jenny.

In accordance with the first standard, the students’ interests were kept to the forefront. For example, the anecdotal records documented students’ response to the teaching strategies I implemented. When summarizing and making connections were not working for Jonathan, I tried another strategy. If I had not recorded this information, I may not have tried new strategies as quickly. After teaching eleven lessons during the day, I may have forgotten what I observed about Jonathan earlier in the day.

As the second standard asserts, my assessment system improved my teaching and my students' learning. I was able to hone my instruction to something that was successful for Jonathan and Miguel. Because I used the QRI – 3 twice and compared the results, I was able to notice Jenny's lack of progress. Discovering this early in the year gave me a chance to improve my teaching for her.

In the third standard, the IRA and the NCTE declare that "the more invasive the assessment, the less valuable the information" (1994, pp. 17-18). None of these assessments were invasive for the students. The students were able to read and write authentic texts while I just observed what they did. Administering the QRI – 3 and the spelling inventories took only minimal time away from instruction.

As the fourth standard asserts, "assessments must reflect the intellectually and socially complex nature of reading and writing" (1994, p. 19). Because my system used a narrative format, I was able to explore some of my students' complexity. It would be much less informative to simply state that Miguel reads below grade level or Jonathan struggles with reading comprehension. My narratives explain much more about their literacy abilities.

According to the seventh standard, "the teacher is the most important agent of assessment" (1994, p. 27). I have found power in my ability to observe students. For instance, I have been able to see exactly where Miguel is in his understanding of letters. I know which letters he confuses and forgets and can use this information to better teach him.

The eighth standard states that "the assessment process should involve multiple perspectives and sources of data" (1994, p. 29). Although most of the information is from my own perspective, I asked the student's perspective when conferring about progress reports and developing portfolios. In addition, Jonathan was able to select the texts used for instruction and assessment; Miguel stated his desire to keep studying sight words. Further, by gathering information on each student from the QRI-3, the spelling inventories, and the anecdotal records, I used multiple sources of data. This gave me a better understanding of each student. For instance, I had not realized Jenny's lack of progress through the anecdotal records, but I was able to notice it when using the QRI-3.

## CONCLUSION

*...faced with students who are reading at different levels, teachers need support in assessing students' needs, identifying appropriate material, and then planning and managing small groups of learners (Valencia, Place, Martin & Grossman, 2006, p. 118).*

Although this assessment system takes a little extra time each day, it is not more time than I typically spend grading student work. What I gleaned from all those hours spent in the past grading papers is what my students did not get right. When I recorded that as a number in my grade book, it told me nothing about how that student was growing. When those students took end-of-the-year standardized tests, I got their scores the following August. The students were gone, and all I had were numbers about which to wonder.

Now, I collect a wealth of information about each student. I know how students are learning, what they need to learn next, and which students need more attention. All of this information is organized so I can easily refer to it. It is impossible for me to keep all of the details of thirty students in my head.

In addition, my students are beginning to be aware of their own learning. They are preparing portfolios and reflecting on their work. This enables them to take more control of their learning and teach me even more about them.

As I continue to work to refine my assessment system, I am learning more than I ever have about my students' instructional needs. Thus, I can be a better teacher for them. Together, we are on a journey of language and literacy development.

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Colleen P. Gilrane teaches at the University of Tennessee. Her teaching and research interests focus on working with teachers to create communities in which all learners have access to literacy that is rich, powerful and joyful.

*Editorial Note: This study documents a teacher-researcher's journey. Jamie Wolfe, the teacher-researcher, conducted the study. Ms. Wolfe was assisted by her faculty advisor, Colleen P. Gilrane.*

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## Effects of Readers' Theatre on English Language Learners: A Strategy for Oral Language and Reading Improvement

Carolyn LaVon Bridges

*This article is based on the dissertation done at the University of Oregon for the completion of the Doctorate of Education, March 2006. The study was designed to investigate the effects of Readers' Theatre, a drama literature program, on the improvement of oral language and reading skills for English Language Learners (ELLs). It was hypothesized that performing Readers' Theatre would improve oral language skills, reading fluency, and reading comprehension more effectively in comparison to the regular reading program currently in use with English Language Learners (ELLs). In order to investigate the hypotheses, a quasi-experimental study compared a treatment group of ELLs to a control group of ELLs. Subjects were pre-tested in oral language, reading fluency, and reading comprehension prior to the treatment and post-tested in these areas following the treatment. The treatment consisted of the use of Readers' Theatre with the experimental group during a 10-week period. A Readers' Theatre script was read and rehearsed daily for two weeks, performed for peers, and video taped at the end of the 2-week period. Students performed Readers' Theatre scripts as a group by reading their roles orally. Five different scripts were used during the intervention. Simple costumes and props were used, and the students stood or sat when performing. The control group followed the regular reading program, which consisted of the use of basal readers, chapter trade books, and a variety of leveled books. The control program matched the students' tested reading levels. The results of the pretests and posttests of the two groups were compared to see if the intervention had a significant effect on oral language, reading fluency, and reading comprehension.*

Readers' Theatre, as defined by McCaslin (1990), is "the oral presentation of drama, prose, or poetry by two or more readers" (p. 263). Readers usually hold the scripts, put them on stands, or put them on the floor as they stand or sit while they read (Barchers, 2001).

The combination of accuracy and fluency help to define a skillful reader (Hasbrouck & Tindal, 1992), and since Readers' Theatre addresses both accuracy and fluency through practice, it is potentially a good strategy. The role of reading rate in reading comprehension and fluency is well established (Muir, 2005; Reutzel, Hollingsworth, & Eldredge, 1994). When a reader can decode fluently and accurately he or she is able to give more attention to comprehension. With Readers' Theatre, students have a chance to practice sentences again and again as they rehearse their lines (Keehn, 2003) and have the opportunity to improve both fluency and accuracy. One of the rewards of this strategy is the fluent and accurate performance of the scripts.

Griffith and Rasinski (2002) implemented Readers' Theatre and other oral reading instructional methods in a study that resulted in an average annual gain of three grade levels in achievement for the lowest level Title I students. Keehn (2003) also found that second grade students at all levels of reading ability made significant gains in rate, phrasing, fluidity, and expressiveness when Readers' Theatre was implemented. Gains were made in comprehension and word recognition as well. Both studies indicated that the opportunities for constant oral practice and the need for modeling and correction aspects may have contributed to the improvement in oral reading and oral language.

### **Purpose of the Study**

In looking at reading theory, there is support for using Readers' Theatre to increase oral language skill, reading fluency, and reading comprehension for ELLs as well as regular English speaking students. The following research questions were addressed in the study:

1. Does the strategy of Readers' Theatre improve oral language and reading skills for English Language Learners?
2. If there is an improvement, is the improvement more effective than the regular district reading program currently in use with English Language Learners?
3. What is the attitude of the participants toward the strategy of Readers' Theatre?

### **Systematic Practice and Rereading**

Readers' Theatre provides an opportunity to support the strategy of systematic practice and rereading by providing students the chance to read and reread as they practice the script. Samuels (1997) discusses the theory of automaticity and decoding automatically which he had written about as early as 1974-79 (Samuels, J.S., 1979; LaBerge & Samuels, 1974). This research brought out the idea that fluent decoding would leave the reader free for comprehension because fluent readers do not have to concentrate as much on decoding and can focus attention on comprehending the text (Adler, 2000). Although being able to read words fluently is not the ultimate goal of reading instruction, it may be necessary for comprehension (Carnine, Silbert, & Kameenui, 1997; Honig, Diamond, & Gutlohn, 2000).

The research of Canney, Kennedy, Schoeder and Miles (1999) discusses the importance of repeated reading opportunities for limited proficient English language learners. These researchers recommend cueing modes, such as drama and song, to build and expand vocabulary beyond the basic social vocabulary. They stress that melody may help learners recall or cue lyrics more easily and that repeated renditions of drama or stories may produce fluent recall of words and phrases. Similarly, Martinez, Roser and Strecker (1999) discuss the advantages Readers' Theatre offers for modeling language for ELLs and for the opportunities to develop fluency by rereading. The direct feedback and modeling help oral language fluency, as does the repeated reading (Keehn, 2003). Worthy and Prater (2002) quote from research done by Ryan and Patrick (2001) that in their combined 40 years of teaching, Readers' Theatre stands out above other strategies for students with challenges in reading. Their stance is that when students rehearse an appropriate text and perform it by reading that they have an opportunity to be successful.

## Comprehension through Hands-on, Experiential Learning

Readers' Theatre provides an opportunity to be actively involved with the use of language. It is "hands-on" in the sense that the student is constructing meaning through dialog and is experiencing the story or literature through the characters and role-play.

Support for this idea is found in Martinez, Roser & Strecker (1999) as they discuss the advantage Readers' Theatre offers in the area of comprehension. As they perform their parts, students "become" the characters and "understand" the feelings well enough to act out the events. Acting out words and events has the potential to increase vocabulary meaning and comprehension. For example, verbs like *jump* can be acted out, and historical events and stories can be dramatized and put into dialog to give meaning and understanding to a text while helping an English learner with both definitions and oral skills (McMaster, 1998).

### *Observational Study*

In the landmark study by Pellegrini and Galda (1982) the results showed a statistically significant difference in comprehension scores for the group that acted out the story in thematic fantasy or role-play over two other groups that used discussion or drawing strategies. The study included 108 students (54 boys and 54 girls). The students were randomly sampled from grades K-2 and randomly placed in one of three treatment groups: thematic fantasy play (drama/role-play), discussion, or drawing. The design for testing was a criterion-referenced test with the sequencing of events and questions based on Bloom's cognitive taxonomy areas. The study is particularly significant in that it pointed out that role-play helped children with oral language and comprehension of the text as they recalled and imagined events and placed themselves directly into the characters' dialog and actions. In addition, the text became more comprehensible through the clear sequencing of events.

Another study (Rose, Parks, Adnross and McMahan, 2001) focused on improving elementary students' reading comprehension with the use of drama techniques. The researchers linked imagery to comprehension. For example, drama requires actors to visualize an image of a scene and all its elements so that it creates a meaningful story. This requires an understanding of the content, sequence, and timing. In this study, 45 students improved their reading scores on a wide range of standardized reading tests after the treatment.

Macy (2004) recently observed a classroom that used drama in a wide range of ways to assist students in their study of a novel to improve their comprehension. This observation is of interest because of the effect the drama activities appear to have on reading comprehension. In this classroom the teacher wanted the students to experience a novel from several levels and perspectives. Drama strategies the teacher used include "imaging, collective drawing, 'soundscape,' giving witness, caption making, story theater, voice in the head, and interview" (pp. 241-2). Macy advocates these activities for teachers who want to create meaning with students by listening to their ideas as they go back to the text to construct the appropriate meanings as they collaborate with classmates.

### ***Narrow Reading***

The strategies of repeated reading and the use of numerous drama readings and activities fit well with recommendation by Schmitt and Carter (2000) for the use of narrow reading for second-language learners. Narrow reading refers to less quantity of reading material and more opportunity to improve the quality of the reading. These researchers note that the students will have a greater chance to develop vocabulary and comprehension. Through narrow reading the words are used again and again, or recycled and integrated. Although researchers may disagree on the number of times a new vocabulary word should be read and used before it is understood and retained, six to twenty times is discussed as a reasonable estimate (Schmitt and Carter, 2000). Readers' Theatre provides a chance to read in a more narrow manner and thereby practice new vocabulary.

### **Cognitive Scaffolding for Oral Language**

Taguchi, Takayasu-Maass, and Gorsuch (2004) found that the combination of assisted, repeated reading, and listening components have the potential to develop weak English Second Language/English Foreign Language students' reading and language abilities by providing a form of scaffolding. The dual components of reading and listening to the reading provide scaffolding through two channels of perception and may increase the retention of words and grammatical constructions in the long-term memory. Taguchi et al. (2004) found that a model of oral assisted, repeated reading is a unique form of scaffolding that allows students to coordinate all of their language resources, including schemata, comprehension, monitoring, and metacognitive skills.

A study by Wolf (1993) is an example of the use of Readers' Theatre with students that were labeled as ELLs or Limited English Proficient. The students were third and fourth graders. Wolf comments on the kind of oral conversation that went into the planning and decisions that had to be made regarding performance and how often the students had to refer to the text for decisions and interpretation. Students who usually had little chance to exert their opinions and make decisions became the experts in interpretation, set designs, directions, and costuming.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The study was a two factor quasi-experimental study. Thirteen elementary schools in the Anchorage School District have Language Learning Centers to assist their English Language Learners. Three comparison schools and three treatment schools were randomly chosen from these 13 elementary schools. The plan was to have at least 20 students in the treatment group and 20 students in the comparison group. The research was able to begin with 19 students in the treatment group and 20 in the comparison group. One student in the treatment group moved back to Mexico. This left 18 students in the treatment group and 20 students in the comparison group. The sampling of students at the schools was random. Students were from fourth, fifth, and sixth grades but at the same overall English level for speaking, reading, and writing. The students in the treatment group and the comparison group were matched according to their English proficiency based on their scores on the Individual Proficiency Tests (Ballard & Tighe, 2001) in speaking, reading, and writing.

All of the treatment schools and one of the comparison schools were Title I schools, which means that the schools qualify to receive Title I funds from the federal government. This classification is based on students' socio-economic status and the number of students who qualify to receive the free and reduced lunch program. Two of the schools were not Title I schools, but they did have large bilingual/ELL populations. All of the schools except one were already at Level 1 status under the No Child Left Behind Act definitions for failing to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for one year. The other school, one of the comparison schools, was at Level 2 as a school failing to make the required AYP for two consecutive years. The students varied in gender and ethnic backgrounds, but they were at approximately the same oral language, reading, and writing levels in English. They were all limited in English proficiency based on district and state required testing.

## **Procedures**

### ***Treatment Group***

The treatment group read Readers' Theatre drama scripts. These scripts were based on stories from various cultures represented by the students in the treatment group. The texts were at high second and low third grade levels. Each of the teachers and tutors received instructions on how to manage the practices, how to keep records of the rehearsals, and how to introduce the scripts. Rehearsal sessions lasted one hour each day for two weeks. At the end of each ten sessions, the English Language Learners performed the script as Readers' Theatre for a video recording and for other students. The intervention lasted for ten weeks and utilized five different Readers' Theatre scripts. Attendance was monitored, and any student who was absent three consecutive days was eliminated from the posttest and final data results.

### ***Comparison Group***

The comparison group did not have the Readers' Theatre intervention. This group also consisted of a sample of English Language Learners from three schools that have language-learning centers. These centers used the regular reading program that was currently in use in the language center, comprised of chapter trade books, and/or leveled books, along with oral language practice. The sessions also lasted for one hour. Thirty minutes was devoted daily to either silent or oral reading and/or oral language and discussion. Oral reading was done in class, or it was assigned as a home assignment. Writing activities such as vocabulary exercises, question and answer, or journal writing were used as follow-ups to the reading.

Because the format at the three comparison schools varied somewhat, the researcher observed the lesson delivery at each school and recorded any differences in delivery and amount of time spent in oral reading practice. Each group received the same pretest and posttest assessments as the group receiving the treatment.

The three groups that comprised the comparison group varied in the way they experienced reading. The books and reading material were different as well. However, the amount of time spent on reading activities was the same, and they each participated in reading, discussing, and writing. In these ways these groups were quite similar.

## Measures

The five measures used in conducting the study were as follows: Adapted Durrell Test, Oral Reading Fluency (ORF), Mean Length of Utterance (MLU), Retell and Interviews. Pretests and posttests were given for each of the measures with the exception of the interview. The Adapted Durrell Test measures reading fluency and addresses comprehension through questioning. Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) was also measured using *Reading A-Z* (The Primary Reading Institute, 2003) and *The Six Minute Solution: A Reading Fluency Program* (Adams & Brown, 2004, p. 41). These oral fluency readings were counter balanced for both pre and posttests. The Mean Length of Utterance (Stickler, 1987) was used to analyze oral language skill. In order to test for the Mean Length of Utterance, it was necessary to have an oral language sample from each student. Scores were derived from the number of phonemes uttered as well as from the number of complete thoughts expressed. Students were asked to retell the passage they had read for the reading fluency tests in order to obtain scores for the MLU. The retell samples were tape-recorded. The recorded retell sample was also used to test the students' comprehension through retelling of what they understood from the reading passage. A rubric from *Reading A-Z* (Primary Reading Institute, 2003) was used to score the student's success at inclusion of key elements. A bilingual/ELL specialist and a speech pathologist administered and scored these measures.

To obtain some qualitative information about how the students in the treatment group felt about their participation in Readers' Theatre, three questions were posed to each student in a private interview with the researcher at the end of the treatment period. These interviews were tape recorded along with the posttest retell after the ten-week treatment.

## Data Analysis

Data were recorded on each pretest and posttest measure for the experimental and comparison groups. The mean and standard deviation of both groups was computed for the pretest and posttest on the reading fluency (i.e. words per minute), Adapted Durrell Reading Test, the Mean Length of Utterance, and the retell rubric.

Two factors were analyzed in this study. One factor was the "between group" factor with two levels, control and treatment. The second factor was "within group" factor looking at time with two levels, pre and post. An ANOVA, mixed between-within subjects, was conducted to measure the test results at two different times between groups. It was necessary to test to see if there was a group effect and a time effect, i.e., whether the groups change over time, but at a different rate. A statistical difference between language groups was not analyzed because the number of each group was too small; in some cases there was only one student per language group. After the descriptive statistics were computed, a *t*-test was computed at  $p = .01$  level to quantify the difference in means between the posttests of the treatment and control groups in each of the four areas of assessment. These areas were correct words per minute (cwpm), comprehension based on the Adapted Durrell Reading Test, oral language skill measured by Mean Length of Utterance, and oral language skill and comprehension using the retell rubric. Levene's Test for Equality of Variances determined which *t*-test to use.

At the end of 10 weeks, students in the treatment group were interviewed to see what they felt they had learned from their participation in Readers' Theatre, what they found difficult, and what they liked about the activity. This information was coded and categorized. Like answers were grouped, and the percent was computed in order to understand the reading attitudes and determine what students felt they had learned from participating in Readers' Theatre.

## RESULTS

### *Question 1: Is Readers' Theatre a Strategy for Improvement?*

Both the treatment group and control group showed growth in comprehension. The mean for the posttest on the Adapted Durrell Reading Test shows the growth in comprehension for the treatment group by .16, and growth for the mean for the control group by .16. The Standard Deviation for the treatment group was lower by .13, and the Standard Deviation for comparison group was lower by .04. No interaction was observed in the Repeated Measure ANOVA for the Durrell Reading Tests.

There was a mean increase of 12.83 words from pretest to posttest for Correct Words Per Minute for the treatment group. The comparison group only increased by 3.63, but the pretest mean was much higher for the comparison group. The Standard Deviation was lower by 1.90 for the treatment group, but the Standard Deviation was higher in the comparison group by 1.43. There was no significant interaction effect with the Correct Words Per Minute.

The treatment group showed only 1.01 gain in mean length of utterance, and the control group actually went down by .44. The Standard Deviation for the treatment group was lower by 2.00, and the Standard Deviation for the comparison was lower by 1.65. No significant interaction effect was found with Mean Length of Utterance.

There was an increase for Retell of Reading in the treatment group posttest from pretest by 3.39. The control group decreased slightly in the retell by .80. The Standard Deviation for the treatment group increased by .89, while the Standard Deviation for the comparison group decreased by .75. Based on the Repeated Measures ANOVA analysis, there was an interaction effect for the Retell of Reading.

Based on the differences between the pretest and posttest means for the treatment group, this data indicates that the use of Readers' Theatre as a strategy does improve oral language and reading skills for English Language Learners.

### *Question 2: Is Readers' Theatre More Effective?*

The *t*-test results for comparing the posttest means between the treatment and comparison groups at  $p = .01$  comparing the posttest means between the treatment and comparison groups for the Adapted Durrell Reading Test showed no significant difference in the mean scores ( $t(29.84)=1.58, p=.13$ ). The Correct Words Per Minute (CWPM) test results showed no significant difference in the posttest mean scores ( $t(36)=-.87, p=.39$ ). The Mean Length of Utterance (MLU) test results showed no significant difference in posttest mean scores ( $t(36)=.29, p=.77$ ). The Retell test results showed no significant difference in the posttest mean scores ( $t(36)=.01, p=.99$ ).

A mixed between-within subjects ANOVA was conducted to explore the interaction effect between the control and treatment groups and pretest and posttest results. The treatment group showed growth in all areas. The statistical analysis for the Retell of Reading showed significant interaction in this area.

### *Question 3: Attitude of the Treatment Group Participants*

In response to the first survey question, “What did you like about Readers’ Theatre?” Some aspect of the drama activity that they liked such as “acting, being in a play, the script, or working on the background” was mentioned by 44%. There were 38% who said that they enjoyed reading or learning to read or that they could understand more of what they read. The process of working together was cited by 13% as very important.

The second survey question was, “What did you find difficult or hard about Readers’ Theatre?” Regarding this question, 65% said that pronouncing some of the words was hard. In addition, 18% mentioned some aspect of reading, such as reading everyday or when they couldn’t read the lines, and 12% said that nothing was hard.

When asked the third question, “What do you think you learned by participating in Readers’ Theatre?” the students answered as follows. Reading improvement was cited by 75%; 19% mentioned “learning new words;” 19% discussed “enjoying the activity as part of learning and that they had fun;” 13% mentioned “working with others;” 13% explained that it was “important to work together, including when more than one person wants the same part.”

The survey showed that students viewed the treatment very positively and that they believed there was value in participating in Readers’ Theatre. They recognized the challenge that it presented in pronouncing and learning new words as well.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the results of this study, Readers’ Theatre appears to be a viable program for increasing oral reading fluency, comprehension, and oral language development (Barker, 1988; Keehn, 2003; Griffith & Rasinski, 2002). While the growth was not statistically more significant for the treatment group in some areas, this study does show that the use of Readers’ Theatre is an appropriate and practical strategy for reading and oral language instruction for English Language Learners. In addition, it proved to be highly motivating and enjoyable for students. The most important consideration for ELL instruction is that the study indicates that students can increase their oral language and retell ability at a significant interaction level through the strategy of Readers’ Theatre. Perhaps equally as important on the affective plane, Readers’ Theatre helps ELLs feel successful in their second language.

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## Playing Videogames: Do Students Choose Specific Foreign Language Learning Strategies in Playing These Games?

Yu-Yuan Lee and Shirley Key

*To evaluate the extent to which students choose specific foreign language learning strategies while playing videogames, a survey was given to 200 college freshmen at an Institute of Technology in Taiwan. The results showed that students use foreign language strategies while playing videogames. Both direct and indirect learning strategies were used by students to cope with language barriers. In addition, gender differences were also found in students' choice of learning strategies. The results also imply that learners might become more autonomous in learning while engaging in game-playing. Based on the results, suggestions for further studies and instructions were also provided.*

Videogames have evolved as an entertainment tool but now may have an impact on our lives in education. Studies propose that videogames have negative effects on players such as aggression (Ballard & West, 1996) and addiction (Hauge & Gentile, 2003). However, more researchers in recent years value the educational power of videogames (Foreman, 2003; Gee, 2003, 2005; Prensky, 2001; Van Eck, 2006).

Playing videogames is popular among "Game-Generations" (Gee, 2003; Prensky, 2001). Videogames form a unique popular social and cultural world among young people (Shaffer, Squire, Halverson & Gee, 2005). Likewise, it has formed a culture in the education community. The applications of videogames can be found in military and business skills training (Jana, 2006), in language and culture learning (Lovgren, 2006), and subject learning in school settings (Kirriemuir & McFarlane, 2003; Squire, 2004).

Applying popular culture in second language (SL)/foreign language (FL) learning settings is a common strategy for instructors to enrich their instructional activities and to motivate students. Playing videogames is an example of a popular cultural activity among today's "Game-Generations" (Prensky, 2001). Playing commercial videogames in FL is common outside many target language countries. While examining the positive influences of educational software/online games on the development of SL/FL competences has received significant attention, other equally important issues, such as how students approach language barriers when playing videogames, may have not been adequately addressed. Hence, this study aimed to examine what strategies students would use while playing videogames. Gender difference in the use of strategies was also examined.

### ***Videogames and learning***

The term *videogame* refers to “any forms of computer-based entertainment software, either textual or image-based, using any electronic platform such as personal computers or consoles and involving one of multiple players in a physical or networked environment” (Frasca, 2001, p. 4). Videogames are good for learning (Gee, 2003, 2005; Prensky, 2001; Van Eck, 2006). Videogames are often touted as motivating, challenging and fun, which can be harnessed to involve students more in the learning process (Malone, 1981; Prensky, 2002). Other advantages, such as situated learning environment (Gee, 2003, 2005), the cycle of cognitive disequilibrium (Van Eck, 2006), and customized learning to learner’s pace (Foreman, 2003) also add to its value for learning. Shaffer and others (2005) argue that videogame playing allows people to take on various roles in a new world that are not accessible in their real lives. Players explore their identity, experience different lives, act out their hypotheses, and construct their own meaning in the game worlds (Blake, 2006; Shaffer, et al, 2005; Um& deHaan, 2005). Knowledge is initiated and transformed in a situated and “learning by doing environment” (Shaffer et al, 2005; p.108), rather than by rote learning.

Van Eck (2006) believes that the process of cognitive disequilibrium makes video games effective for learning. Learning occurs when the new information balances between assimilation and accommodation within a learner’s old schemas. In order to win the games, when players encounter the cognitive conflict, which is called disequilibrium, they are motivated to reconstruct their knowledge (Van Eck, 2006). Video gaming not only embeds the cycle of cognitive disequilibrium, it also provides immediate feedback, which allows gamers constantly to test their hypotheses and revise them in the game playing process (Foreman, 2003; Van Eck, 2006).

### ***Videogames for language learning***

Videogames, either entertaining or educational, have been used to promote language learning. Research findings include the improvement of students’ reading and spelling (Rosas et al., 2003), listening and reading skills (deHaan, 2005b), and the delivery of important concepts in writing skills (Coleman, 2002).

Studies have proposed several merits to harness gaming for language learning: repetition and control of language (deHaan, 2005b), increasing chances to be exposed to target language (deHaan, 2005b; Purushotma, 2005), and the rich graphics and visual and audio aid simultaneously (deHaan, 2005b). deHaan (2005b) claims that the feature of repetition of language in each task of a game facilitates language learning. More importantly, language learning can be controlled in the game world (deHaan, 2005b). For instance, learners have control over the speed and repetition of language while playing. Players can pause, repeat, and check the meaning of words with friends or chat online, when the language is crucial to winning the game. Thus, in the game world, learning is pace-controlled and can be customized to individual needs (deHaan, 2005b; Foreman, 2003).

Purushotma (2005) and deHaan (2005b) both believe that language learners can increase their chances of being exposed to an authentic meaningful interaction with the target language when immersed in the game world. In the game world, players need to understand the language from the tutorials or pop-up messages because these messages are

highly related to the success of the task and cannot be neglected. Accordingly, players absorb some passive language skills from the simulated language immersion in a game world.

Yoshii (2006) indicates that picture annotation is crucial for effective vocabulary learning and retention. The rich graphics in the game world facilitate language learning because new words and symbols are connected together (Shaffer et al., 2005). Players can use contextual clues or pictures to guess and decode the unknown words (Purushotma, 2005). Furthermore, many videogames also present players with text and audio language inputs simultaneously (deHaan, 2005b). Through the link among pictures, text, and audio of the language, language learning tasks can be facilitated.

### *Second/foreign language learning strategies*

Learning strategies are specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, and more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations. According to Oxford (1990), the strategies are classified as direct and indirect. Direct strategies are memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies. Memory strategies include creating mental linkages, applying images and sounds, reviewing well, and employing action. Cognitive strategies include practicing, receiving and sending messages, analyzing and reasoning, and creating structure for input and output. Compensation strategies include guessing intelligently and overcoming limitations in speaking and writing (Oxford, 1990).

Contrastingly, indirect strategies are metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. Metacognitive strategies include entering, arranging, planning, and evaluating one's learning. Affective strategies include lowering one's anxiety, encouraging oneself, and taking one's emotional temperature. Social strategies include asking questions, cooperating with others, and empathizing with others (Oxford, 1990). These strategies are applied to the four learning skills of listening, reading, speaking, and writing.

A deeper look at the process of video gaming reveals several strategies learners use to become acculturated to the game world. Such strategies also aid them in learning a new language. To illustrate, when facing language barriers in the games, learners try to figure out the meaning during the play or after the play (cognitive strategy), discuss meaning with friends during the play (social strategy), or choose to ignore the new words or give up playing (compensation strategies). Furthermore, players can repeat playing videogames to help them learn a target language (memory strategy) or select a certain type of game for language learning (metacognitive strategy). More importantly, to reduce the anxiety of learning a target language, the fun element embedded in videogames can be harnessed to motivate language learning (affective strategy).

## **METHODOLOGY**

For this study, a questionnaire was designed to evaluate the extent students choose specific foreign language learning strategies while playing videogames. It is assumed that when confronting the language barriers in the game world, certain strategies will be used by players to decide whether or not to continue the playing process.

The survey questionnaire was a five-point Likert scale, consisting of two sections: demographic information and type of language learning strategies. The survey questions were developed based on the studies of deHaan (2005a; 2005b) and Kirriemuir and McFarlane (2004). Two hundred college freshmen at an Institute of Technology in Taiwan were invited to participate in the study. Participants were a cross section of the population of approximately 800 business majors, English as a foreign language majors, and computer and communication majors. Only 173 valid data were used for further analysis. Both males (110) and females (63) were included and ranged in age from 19 to 24. Participants have been learning English for more than six years. Data were collected and sent them back to the researcher by the three volunteered teachers. Chi-square analyses were conducted to answer the research questions.

## RESULTS

### *Question 1: What strategies do students use while playing videogames?*

Both direct and indirect strategies were found in this study. Cognitive strategies (figuring out meaning) and memory strategy (playing games helps learning) were used the most, whereas compensation strategies (giving up playing) were used the least. The percentages for the strategies applied were presented in table 1.

Table 1

Types of Strategies	Items	Response Level ( <i>Agree</i> )
Indirect: Affective	Have fun in both Chinese and FL	58.6% (n = 109)
Direct: Cognitive	Try to figure out the unknown words	65.7% (n = 121)
Direct: Compensation	Give up playing facing many new words	28.5% (n = 53)
Direct: Compensation	Ignore the unknown words	51.6% (n = 95)
Direct: Cognitive	Check the meanings when playing	38.6% (n = 71)
Indirect: Social	Discuss with someone else	46.4% (n = 84)
Direct: Memory	Playing videogames helps learn a FL	63.5% (n = 117)
Indirect: Metacognitive	To play certain games to learn a FL	41.5% (n = 76)

*Percentage agreement to the type of strategy addressed in the questionnaire (N = 173)*

### *Question 2: Do males and females differ in their strategies used while playing video games?*

The Chi-square test of independence was used to determine whether male and female

students differ in the strategies use while playing videogames. The results indicated that there was a significant association between gender and three of the language learning strategies. They are affective strategy (have fun playing English/Japanese video games) $\chi^2(1) = 8.63, p < .005, \Phi = .22$ ; compensation strategy (giving up playing) $\chi^2(1) = 22.34, p < .001, \Phi = .36$ ; and metacognitive strategy (playing certain type of games) $\chi^2(1) = 14.50, p < .001, \Phi = .29$ . These results indicated that male participants tend to have a higher rate in applying the affective strategy (have fun playing English/Japanese) and the metacognitive strategy (playing certain type of games) to learn a foreign language. Interestingly, female participants tend to apply the compensation strategy (giving up playing) at a higher rate when coping with too many unknown words.

## DISCUSSION

The study results showed two main findings: 1) Most participants applied “direct strategies” and “indirect strategies” at the same level. Cognitive strategies were used the most. This finding supports O’Malley, Chamot, Stewner-Manzanares, Kupper, and Russo’s (1985) study in which cognitive strategy is the most often used strategy among language learners. Interestingly, metacognitive strategy was also used by the participants in this study. This indicated that students use game formats to enhance their foreign language learning on purpose outside classrooms. Although language skills learned through games need further study, the finding implies that learners might become more autonomous in learning while engaging in game-play. This researchers’ argument is that if students are autonomous in searching for knowledge they do not know, the process will eventually facilitate their gaining the knowledge, especially in the game world. 2) Gender is a significant variable that affects the choice of language learning strategies when using videogames for learning. Because females felt less engaged in games, they were inclined to apply the compensation strategies (give up playing) when confronting too many unknown words. In contrast, videogames are predominately a male activity, that is, more males than females report playing videogames. Males tend to use the affective strategy (having fun playing videogames) and the metacognitive strategy (play certain types of games to learn) for second/foreign language learning. Videogames are highly goal-oriented activities. To achieve the goals, males will keep trying to receive the pleasure of control and achievement from the results (scores) (Eglaze, Fekete, Kiss & Izso, 2005). This will encourage males to seek ways to overcome language barriers and help them gain language knowledge as a by-product at the same time.

Further avenues of research would include looking into whether a specific game genre affects the persistent use of certain types of language learning strategies between males and females. Gender was a significant variable in the choice of certain strategies in the present study; however, different gender-oriented games might affect the choice of certain strategies. For instance, sports games, first-person shooting games, and adventure games are male-predominated. Males tend to receive pleasure in these types of games as opposed to females. In contrast, females might have more fun playing non-gender-oriented games, such as *SimCity* or *School Tycoon*, and respond differently from males in terms of language learning strategies. Further questions needing to be answered are the following: 1) How do males and females answer on the persistence use of certain language learning strategies when using different genres of games? 2) How do different genre of games relate to the choice of certain language learning strategies? and 3) What genre of games are good for males or females in terms for encouraging them to use more language learning strategies?

In conclusion, it is believed that students will be more motivated to learn if the curriculum is based on what they are already embracing and interested in (Rosas et al., 2003). Foreman (2003) has suggested that immersive videogames can be ideal learning environment in the future. The results from this study implied that immersive videogames may be acceptable as a learning environment for SL/FL students because they do choose specific SL/FL learning strategies while playing videogames. This study indicated that there is an educational value found in game-playing and that SL/FL educators should take advantage to help increase learning and achievement. Meanwhile, gender can be a crucial factor that might affect the applications. To equally appeal to all students, SL/FL educators should be aware of how to balance males' and females' preference in choosing certain types of games when applying videogames in SL/FL learning. Using immersive videogames as learning and teaching tools could benefit more learners in the future.

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## Correlation between Learners' English Learning Strategies and Proficiency Based on the General English Proficiency Test in Taiwan

Hsiu-Chen Chen

*This study compares Taiwanese students' English learning strategies with their English proficiencies for those who completed the GEPT<sup>1</sup> (General English Proficiency Test) in Taiwan. Questionnaires, adapted from Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), were given to students in senior high schools, vocational high schools, and junior colleges in Taiwan. The comparison of students' learning strategies focused on (1) the overall pass or failure on GEPT and (2) the pass or failure on four language subskills. The results reveal that Taiwanese students used different learning strategies when they studied English. Moreover, students who passed the test used more strategies than those who failed.*

Foreign language study, especially the study of English, is an important educational goal in Taiwan. However, EFL (English as foreign language) learners in Taiwan receive limited exposure to authentic oral input of English. Despite their best efforts to learn the language, many students encounter difficulties in their acquisition of English. Wharton (2000, p. 206) stated, "more proficient language learners use more learning strategies than less proficient language learners." Dickinson (1987) suggested that learners could take more responsibility for their own learning if they used appropriate learning strategies. Both indicated the importance of learning strategies in language learning. A knowledge of appropriate learning strategies may be beneficial to Taiwanese English learners, who, though studying very hard, often have difficulty passing the many proficiency tests given each year. The purpose of this study is to find out whether there are some strategies used more frequently for those who passed the GEPT, the General English Proficiency Test, than those who did not. The findings may help Taiwanese students in their English learning and may be applicable to other learners also.

Most Taiwanese students are multilingual speakers when they start to learn English. They can already speak two or more languages--Mandarin Chinese, Taiwanese, Hokka, or an aboriginal language--before they learn English. Yet only a few really ever master English. If we can find the strategies that good language learners use, then learning a foreign language could become much easier.

What kinds of learners are considered good learners? Wharton (2000) proposes that good learners (1) have more practice in language, (2) have positive attitudes, (3) use monitoring, (4) seek verification (clarification), and (5) are active participants. In other words, good learners seem to use strategies. Oxford (1990) theorized there are two dif-

ferent categories of strategies: direct strategies and indirect strategies. Direct strategies are those that directly involve the target language: memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies. Indirect strategies are those that support and manage language learning without directly involving the target language: metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. Wharton's propositions compare to Oxford's in the cognitive (practice), affective (positive attitude and active participants), metacognitive (self-monitor), and social (seeking verification) strategies. Lee (1995) proposed that teachers should train learners to become more autonomous in the language learning process and to use cooperative learning strategies, similar to Oxford's social strategies, as crucial learning strategies. She also proposed that learners should also apply learning strategies to learning tasks both in the classroom and outside of the classroom.

This study focused on the comparison of students' language learning strategies between two groups: students who successfully passed the General English Proficiency Test (GEPT) in Taiwan and students who failed in the test. With these findings, I hope I can arrive at some conclusions on which strategies good learners prefer and use most often.

### **Previous Studies of Learning Strategies**

Articles that introduced and discussed learning strategies (Rubin, 1975& 1981, Oxford, 1990, and Cohen, 1995& 2003) were followed by many specific and focused studies based on these theories of learning strategies. The majority of these studies used questionnaires to collect analytical data. Some early studies on the use of the strategies (Chamot, 1987, O'Malley and Walker, 1989; Yang 1992; Sy 1994; Lee 1995; Oxford & Ehrman 1995; and Wharton, 2000) showed that higher frequencies of strategy use existed among learners at higher proficiency levels. Cohen (2003) stated that learners' learning style preferences affected their uses of learning strategies. Hsiao & Oxford (2002) compared theories of language learning strategies with a confirmatory factor analysis. Masgoret & Gardner (2003) stated that attitudes and motivation played an important role in any learning task. Oxford (2003) introduced some key concepts of learning styles, learning strategies, and motivation. Studies on ethnocentric differences<sup>2</sup> showed that Asians preferred strategies involving rote memorization and a focus on the linguistic code, such as language, dialect, and style (Politzer and McGroarty, 1985; Chamot, 1987; Reid, 1987; and Ellis & Sinclair, 1989). O'Malley et al. (1985) also indicated that Asians were more reluctant than Hispanics to try new learning techniques. Dirksen (1990) stated that Chinese EFL students' favorite learning styles for foreign language learning were considerably different from the Chinese-traditional learning styles with its lecture-and textbook-centered approach.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Questions**

This study is based on the survey of the correlation between students' different strategy uses and their GEPT grades. The research questions guiding this study are these:

1. Are there any differences in Taiwanese students' learning strategy use between students who passed the GEPT and students who failed?
2. Are there any different learning strategies used between those students who passed/failed the GEPT in the listening, speaking, reading, and writing portions?

**Instrumentation**

The questionnaire used in this study is revised from Oxford’s *Strategy Inventory for Language Learning* (SILL), version 7.0 (ESL/EFL) (Oxford, 1989). The original version is a 50-item self-report survey. Because a pilot study indicated that some of the items were too ambiguous for Taiwanese students and because of time limitations, I adapted the questionnaire into a 30-item self-report survey (in Chinese) with 6 strategy factors: memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social. Before students completed the questionnaires, they answered some questions on personal information (see Appendix A). Each factor had 5 items (see Appendix B). A series of chi-square difference tests with SPSS version 10 was used to analyze the collected questionnaire data.

**Subjects**

The questionnaires are given to 500 students in northern and central Taiwan. These students are junior college students, high school students and vocational school students, representing three different kinds of educational system in Taiwan. Finally, 207 valid questionnaires are analyzed. Invalid questionnaires, including ones that indicated the informant had not taken the GEPT, that were incomplete, or in which answers were all the same, were eliminated.

**RESULTS**

The reliability coefficient of the SILL was measured at .91 confidence level using Cronbach’s alpha. Kruskal-Wallis H tests were used to examine each SILL item for significant variation by pass/failure rate of the GEPT, pass/failure the listening part, pass/failure of the speaking part, pass/failure of the reading part, and pass/failure of the writing part.

***Significant variation by pass/failure of GEPT***

Table 1 shows that students who passed or failed the GEPT demonstrated significant differences in the use of cognitive strategies (item 6, and 7); compensation strategies (item 15); metacognitive strategies (item 16, 17, and 19); affective strategies (item 22); and social strategies (item 26, 29, and 30).

Table 1

Strategy significance by pass/failure of GEPT

Item	c <sup>2</sup>	p	Item	c <sup>2</sup>	p	Item	c <sup>2</sup>	p
6	8.695	0.003 *	17	4.804	0.028 *	29	5.135	0.023 *
7	14.578	0.000 *	19	4.259	0.039 *	30	6.786	0.009 *
15	7.925	0.005 *	22	4.278	0.039 *			
16	4.810	0.028 *	26	4.077	0.043 *			

\*critical value of c<sup>2</sup>=3.841 (df=1), p<0.05

**Significant Variation by Pass/Failure of the Listening Section**

From Table 2, we see that students who passed the test in the listening part used more cognitive strategies (item 7 and item 8), compensation strategies (item 11, 14, and 15), metacognitive strategies (item 16, 17, 19, and 20), affective strategies (item 22), and social strategies (item 30).

Table 2

Strategies significance by pass/failure of the listening part

Item	c <sup>2</sup>	p	Item	c <sup>2</sup>	p	Item	c <sup>2</sup>	p
7	12.081	0.001 *	15	11.742	0.001 *	20	5.324	0.021 *
8	10.795	0.001 *	16	9.331	0.002 *	22	7.298	0.007 *
11	8.026	0.005 *	17	7.196	0.007 *	30	4.177	0.041 *
14	9.504	0.002 *	19	7.829	0.005 *			

\*critical value of c<sup>2</sup>=3.841 (df=1), p<0.05

**Significant Variation by Pass/Failure of the Speaking Section**

Table 3 shows that there were only two items that showed significant differences between these two groups, item 5 (memory strategy) and item 9 (cognitive strategy).

Table 3

Strategies significance by pass/failure of the speaking part

Item	c <sup>2</sup> df	p	Item	c <sup>2</sup> df	p
5	4.266 1	0.039 *	9	4.451 1	0.035 *

\*critical value of c<sup>2</sup>=3.841 (df=1), p<0.05

**Significant Variation by Pass/Failure of the Reading Section**

Table 4 shows items that showed significant variation were items 1 and 2 (memory strategy), items 6 and 7 (cognitive strategy), items 11 and 15 (compensation strategy), items 16 and 17 (metacognitive strategy), and item 29 (social strategy). Those who passed the test used more strategies than those who failed.

Table 4

Strategies significance by pass/failure of the reading part

Item	c <sup>2</sup> df	p	Item	c <sup>2</sup> df	p
1	3.965 1	0.046 *	15	4.938 1	0.026 *
2	5.630 1	0.018 *	16	4.118 1	0.042 *
6	5.986 1	0.014 *	17	7.350 1	0.007 *
7	4.162 1	0.041 *	29	4.343 1	0.037 *
11	4.831 1	0.028 *			

\*critical value of c<sup>2</sup>=3.841 (df=1), p<0.05

**Significant Variation by Pass/Failure of the Writing Section**

Table 5 shows students who passed the test on the writing part had significant differences on memory strategy (item 4), cognitive strategies (item 7, 8, and 9), compensation strategy (item 15), metacognitive strategies (item 16 and 17), affective strategy (item 25), and social strategy (item 30).

Table 5

Strategies significance by pass/failure of the writing part

Item	c <sup>2</sup> df	p	Item	c <sup>2</sup> df	p
4	5.106	1 0.024 *	16	3.911	1 0.048 *
7	11.063	1 0.001 *	17	6.599	1 0.010 *
8	8.300	1 0.004 *	25	4.254	1 0.039 *
9	7.871	1 0.005 *	30	5.185	1 0.023 *
15	6.843	1 0.009 *			

\*critical value of c<sup>2</sup>=3.841 (df=1), p<0.05

**Summary table of significant useful strategy items used by the students**

Table 6

Strategies significant items used by Taiwanese students

Coding Part	Passed the whole test	Passed the listening part	Passed the speaking part	Passed the reading part	Passed the writing part
Strategy					
Memory			5	1,2	4
Cognitive	6,7	7,8	9	6,7	7,8,9
Compensation	15	11,14,15		11,15	15
Metacognitive	16,17,19	16,17,19,20		16,17	16,17
Affective	22	22			25
Social	26,29,30	30		29	30

\* The numbers in the table are the numbers of the items

## DISCUSSION

Wharton (2000) indicated that more proficient language learners used more learning strategies than less proficient language learners. This study supports Wharton's findings. Students who passed the GEPT used more strategies than those who failed the GEPT.

From Table 6, we see there are significant differences on direct and indirect learning strategies except memory strategies. Because most Taiwanese students are taught to recite whatever they have learned, memory is a basic strategy for all students, not only in language learning but also in general learning. This finding supports O'Malley et al.'s (1985) "ethnocentric assumption" that "Asians prefer strategies involving rote memorization and a focus on the linguistic code." However, there are significant differences between students who passed/failed the GEPT in the other five strategy areas (cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies). Wharton (2000) stated "good learners use many strategies... such as practicing, positive attitude, monitor, seeking verification (clarification), and active participants." Taiwanese EFL learners who passed GEPT are what Wharton would label "good learners."

### *Strategies used on listening, speaking, reading, and writing*

Cohen (1995) stated that language learners use performance strategies and communication strategies. Performance strategies are those that relate to cognitive processing and attempt to compensate for gaps in target language knowledge. Those strategies that focus on getting a message across are communication strategies, which may or may not have any impact on learning. We might compare Oxford's direct strategies (memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies) to performance strategies and her indirect strategies (metacognitive, affective, and social strategies) to communication strategies. If so, then Table 6 shows that Taiwanese students who pass GEPT used more communication strategies than performance strategies. This finding is similar to Wharton's proposition (2000) that bilingual Asian students favored social strategies more than any other strategies.

From Table 6, we can see that there are almost no significant differences on the use of memory strategies for Taiwanese students in the listening part. Cohen (2003) divided learner's learning styles into various preferences. Extroverted learners used more social strategies than introverted learners, and concrete-sequential learners preferred memory strategies. Even though all Taiwanese students are taught to recite whatever they are learning in their study, in speaking, reading and writing parts, students who pass GEPT uses a few more memory strategies than those who failed.

## CONCLUSION

This study, as did some earlier studies, found some similarities and differences in strategy use. First, more proficient language learners use more learning strategies, and Taiwanese students tend to prefer the rote memorization strategy as noted by O'Malley et al. (1985). There are no significant differences in the uses of memory strategies for Taiwanese learners on GEPT between the two groups. Second, as for the other five strategies, students who passed GEPT used more than those who failed. For different kinds of language tests—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—learners used different kinds of strategies. Although some other studies showed that Asians were more reluctant to try

new learning techniques, this study shows that Taiwanese students who passed GEPT used more communication strategies than performance strategies.

Learning strategies must be evaluated in terms of their effectiveness for individual learners in the completion of given language tasks. This study suggests that different strategies are preferred for different language tasks. The use of appropriate strategies can encourage learners to take more responsibility for their own learning. Since no single strategy is appropriate for all learners, instructors should promote the use of a variety of learning strategies, and for language learning, focus on both performance and communication strategies.

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>GEPT is an English proficiency test (General English Proficiency Test) in Taiwan. It is divided into five levels: elementary, intermediate, high-intermediate, advanced and superior. Each level tests students' four skills of English—listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Students who take part in the test will get a grade for each part. If students fail on one of the four skills, they will fail on the test. In each level, students must make certain scores in all the four skill parts of GEPT. The scores for passing in listening, speaking, reading, and writing parts are 80/120 (pass score/total score), 80/100, 80/120, and 70/100, respectively. If students do not pass any one part of the test, they do not pass the GEPT.

<sup>2</sup>O'Malley et al. (1985) expressed an ethnocentric assumption on language learning that students of different ethnicities have a tendency to use or avoid certain strategies in their learning.

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**Appendix A**

Background Questionnaire (translated from Chinese)

1. Sex:  M  F
2. Educational system:  senior high school  vocational school  junior college
3. Starting age of learning English:  
 pre-school  elementary school  junior high school
4. Pass/Fail the GEPT:  Pass (if you pass, please do question 5)  
 Fail (if you fail, please do question 6)  Didn't attend the GEPT
5. Level of GEPT:  
 elementary  intermediate  high-intermediate  
 advanced  superior
6. Which part(s) didn't you pass?  listening  speaking  reading  writing

**Appendix B**

Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (revised from Oxford's SILL, version 7.0 for ESL/EFL) (translated from Chinese)

1. Never or almost never true of me
2. Usually not true of me
3. Somewhat true of me
4. Usually true of me
5. Always or almost always true of me

Circle the answer in terms of how well the statement describes you. Do not answer how you think you should be, or what other people do. There are no right or wrong answers to these statements.

1.	I think of relationships between what I already know and new things I learn in English.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	I use new English words in a sentence so I can remember them.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	I connect the similar pronunciation in Chinese to help me remember the word.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	I use flashcards to remember new English words.	1	2	3	4	5
5.	I remember English words by synonym or antonym.	1	2	3	4	5
6.	I say or write new English words several times, using prefix or suffix to remember new words..	1	2	3	4	5
7.	I try to talk with others in English.	1	2	3	4	5
8.	I watch English language TV shows spoken in English, go to movies spoken in English, listen to English broadcasting, or read English newspaper.	1	2	3	4	5
9.	I write notes, messages, emails, or reports in English.	1	2	3	4	5
10.	I try not to translate word-for-word.	1	2	3	4	5
11.	To understand unfamiliar English words, I make guesses.	1	2	3	4	5
12.	When I can't think of a word during a conversation in English, I use gestures.	1	2	3	4	5
13.	I make up new words if I do not know the right ones in English. (ex. use "airball" to express "balloon")	1	2	3	4	5
14.	I read English without looking up every new word.	1	2	3	4	5
15.	If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing.	1	2	3	4	5
16.	I try to find as many ways as I can to use my English.	1	2	3	4	5
17.	I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me do better.	1	2	3	4	5
18.	I pay attention when someone is speaking English.	1	2	3	4	5
19.	I try to find out how to be a better learner of English.	1	2	3	4	5
20.	I look for people I can talk in English.	1	2	3	4	5
21.	I try to relax whenever I feel afraid of using English.	1	2	3	4	5
22.	I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake.	1	2	3	4	5
23.	I give myself a reward or treat when I do well in English.	1	2	3	4	5
24.	I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am studying or using English.	1	2	3	4	5
25.	I talk to someone else about how I feel when I am learning English.	1	2	3	4	5
26.	If I do not understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or say it again.	1	2	3	4	5
27.	I ask English speakers or others to correct me when I talk.	1	2	3	4	5
28.	I practice English with other students.	1	2	3	4	5
29.	I ask for help from English speakers.	1	2	3	4	5
30.	I ask questions in English.	1	2	3	4	5

Thank you for your help.

## Pre-reading Strategies for English Language Learners

Beverly J. Hearn

*Both native speakers of English and English language learners use similar cognitive processes when learning to read. Based on the assumption that the same reading strategies that work for native speakers will be effective for ELLs as well, the use of three pre-reading strategies recommended for native speakers of English is suggested for the ELL population. Pre-reading strategies are designed to activate prior knowledge and to assist schema development, as well as to motivate the reader. It is hoped that these classic pre-reading strategies from the general literature of reading can be taught by ESL teachers to the ELL population with positive results.*

Teachers who are concerned about teaching reading to all students, including English Language Learners (ELLs) as well as native language speakers, may ask themselves whether ELLs need to be taught the same reading strategies as native English speakers or whether ELLs need to use entirely different reading strategies. With the current emphasis on accountability in education and the current public pressure on educators to make rapid progress with English language learners, this is an pertinent question for teachers of English language learners.

Although there is not a great deal of research on the specific reading strategies which are most effective with ELLs, a review of the research on English language learners' reading processes (Fitzgerald, 1995) may provide some direction for those who teach reading to English language learners. Fitzgerald's research review synthesized the results of 17 reports comparing ESL readers' processes to the reading processes used by native speakers. After comparing the results of the studies, Fitzgerald concluded that most aspects of the reading process appeared similar in both English language learners and native speakers of English. The major difference between ELL readers and their native English reader counterparts seemed to be quantitative: ELLs used fewer different reading strategies, and strategies were used less frequently by ELLs than by native speakers. Whether or not the ELLs had been taught as many strategies as the native language readers was not determined, but to the veteran teacher the suggestion that reading strategies are often overlooked in favor of an emphasis on teaching basic decoding rings true. Other than the differences in the quantity of strategies known and the frequency of their use, the basic thinking processes used by both English language learners and their native language reader counterparts seem to be parallel.

In sum, the entire group of ELL readers used fewer strategies than native language readers; and the less proficient ELLs used the fewest strategies of all. Because ELL and native language readers both used similar cognitive processes when they read and because

the more proficient readers among the ELL group used more reading strategies, it is not a stretch to assume that part of the gap might be bridged by teaching reading strategies to ELLs alongside the customary emphases on vocabulary and decoding. Similar reading strategies may be effective for both populations, again, since the reading process itself appears to be very similar. This paper focuses on three strategies for pre-reading which are recommended in the reading literature for general use and suggests crossover use of the primary speakers' reading strategies with English language learners. It is true that the effectiveness of these strategies with ELLs is assumed rather than research-based. Research on the effectiveness of specific reading strategies with ELLs is definitely the next step.

The previously mentioned Fitzgerald (1995) meta-study also found several ways of thinking that the more proficient ELL readers had in common. Among other factors, the more proficient ELL readers used prior knowledge to help determine the meaning of text. The value of activating and developing prior knowledge before learning about a subject is quite palpable in day to day classroom life. Students tend to be uninterested in topics they know nothing about, and conversely, the more they know about a subject, the more interesting it becomes. By engaging in pre-reading strategies which develop background knowledge before reading a text, teachers can find how much students already know about the subject; as that information is shared by the group, background knowledge will be increased for everyone. Activation of schema and prior knowledge is one of the most beneficial strategies that ELL teachers can engage in before reading to increase comprehension (Murtagh, 1987).

Prior knowledge, vocabulary building, and active engagement are all encompassed in the first suggested pre-reading strategy: possible sentences (Moore & Arthur, 1981). The possible sentences strategy is recommended for intermediate and above level ELLs. To implement this strategy, the teacher chooses five new words that the ELL will encounter in the upcoming reading selection. Before reading, and without searching in the dictionary for the meanings of the words, students create possible sentences by making guesses and using the new word in a silly sentence. Writing sentences with words with which students have little or no background requires the student to let go of the idea of perfection. This can be a risk-taking step for some English language learners, but hesitation is usually overcome when the resultant humorous syntactical creations are shared.

In the second step of the possible sentences strategy, the students read the text selection with the sole purpose of determining the true meaning of the vocabulary words that they have just used in the possible sentences. Engagement results from curiosity about the possible sentences and the desire to discover the actual meaning of the vocabulary words they have just used. Students access their own prior knowledge of the subject as they simultaneously search for clues to the meaning of the target words to verify whether their possible sentences are accurate.

The third step of the possible sentences strategy occurs after the first reading. At this point, the teacher asks students to write new sentences in which the words are to be used, this time more correctly. Again, students share their sentences aloud and discuss the clues that gave away the meaning of the target words. Finally, students record their acceptable sentences in their vocabulary notebooks. The possible sentences strategy can be adapted to the high beginner level by permitting the students to work in pairs. For ELL beginners, silly sentences can be written by the class as a group. Rather than writ-

ing correct sentences on their own, beginners locate the sentence where the vocabulary word is used in the text, copy it into their vocabulary notebooks, and draw illustrations.

Possible sentences strategy allows the student to demonstrate comprehension of the text and to extend the use of the text's concepts by creating their own sentences. This strategy also requires a form of personal response to the text. Many aspects of literacy are used in the possible sentences strategy: prediction, writing skills, speaking skills, listening skills for discussion, evaluative thinking, and comprehension monitoring as meanings are corrected. As English language learners move through the process of creating, evaluating and correcting possible sentences, their teachers can determine their degree of background knowledge, and the students can learn from each other as they discuss, share, and build background together.

The second pre-reading strategy actually emerges from the literature of teaching writing and was originally developed as a thinking strategy to help authors overcome writer's block (Cowan & Cowan, 1980). Cubing, as the strategy is called, can also be used to determine and build background before reading. Cubing is well-suited for high intermediate English language learners and encourages them to stretch as they try to think in depth about six specific aspects of the subject that they are preparing to study or read about. In addition to determining and building background knowledge, the skills of speaking, elaboration, and writing are also supported by the use of the cubing strategy.

To prepare the class to read or study a text using cubing as the pre-reading strategy, the teacher must prepare the cube in advance. A cardboard cube or box is covered with six labels: Describe it; Compare it; Associate it; Analyze it; Apply it; and Argue for or against it. Before reading the text, the students use the cube to discuss the topic at the six levels. (Note that the levels represent six levels of thinking). As a variation, instead of discussing the topic, students may free-write about each aspect of the topic for a limited period of time (3-5 minutes); after writing they share information with the class or in groups.

Cubing can be adapted to different ELL levels by requiring different levels of response. Beginners create semantic maps with their teachers around the core concept; the six aspects of the cube would instead radiate from the center of the semantic map. With the guidance of the teacher, students write specific words that describe, compare, and otherwise relate to the focus word. For high beginners, pattern sentences are supplied and students fill in the blank with an appropriate word (i.e., for a comparison, Climate is like... because...). Intermediates write one or two sentences about each of the six aspects. Advanced students could write individual paragraphs based on one of the six aspects of the cube, and later combine their paragraphs to construct six paragraph group essays. Cubing helps students delve deeper into their background knowledge than might be possible with simple K-W-L charts or brainstorming because the six sides of the cube go from basic description to evaluative thinking. Cubing also provides a good foundation for purposeful discussion and works as a pre-writing strategy.

The third and final pre-reading strategy suggested from the literature of content area reading, both builds schema and motivates all students to read (Kozen, Murray, & Windell, 2006). It is called the anticipation guide. Frequently English language learners may have mistaken ideas about a particular subject that need to be corrected. Anticipation guides assist by focusing the reader on such misconceptions before the reading

takes place, and the class discussion of the preview statements in the anticipation guide prepares the student to be more open about the topic of the reading. Anticipation guides also focus students' thinking and assist the reader in determining ahead of time what will be important in the text to follow. Similar to possible sentences, anticipation guides arouse curiosity and motivate readers to find out whether or not their opinions are correct.

The anticipation guide consists of several sentences about the text that is to be read, and the students must state whether they agree or disagree with each statement prior to reading. To create an anticipation guide, the teacher writes three to six statements about the basic concepts of the reading, choosing ideas that will stimulate prior knowledge and stir discussion. The anticipation guide can be adjusted for all levels of ELLs by adjusting the number and complexity of the sentences. Beginners might start with an anticipation guide of one three to four word sentence, while advanced ELLs might respond to a ten-sentence anticipation guide written at grade level.

Students must read the statements and answer whether they agree or disagree before reading the text itself. One sample statement on a controversial subject might be "AIDS may be spread by kissing." Students then discuss their answers with pair partners, in groups, or with the class as a whole. They are required to tell why they hold their particular opinion rather than just stating whether they agree or disagree. The open discussion builds background, motivates students to read, and gives ELLs a voice as they share their own opinions. After reading, students get a chance to change their answers in pairs or discussion groups. In the final discussion, after repeated readings, the teacher brings closure and corrects any misconceptions that may still exist.

The formal use of the anticipation guide should be extended until it becomes a strategy that students automatically use. It is a constructed model for accessing prior knowledge and supports students as they learn to use prediction as a pre-reading strategy. Anticipation guides are excellent tools for English language learners because they promote critical thinking and cross-cultural understanding (Conley, 1985).

The cognitive benefits of using pre-reading strategies to ready students to read cannot be overestimated. By using pre-reading strategies such as anticipation guides, cubing, and possible sentences, teachers make explicit to readers how to practice reading strategies such as prediction and using prior knowledge. It is true that English language learners use similar cognitive processes when reading, so the intended use of these strategies is to motivate ELLs to read English texts and to enable them to more readily comprehend English texts. ELLs can benefit from the three outlined reading strategies originally designed for native speakers and outlined in the literature of reading; however, more research will be necessary to determine the quantitative benefits of these strategies specific to English language learners.

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## Sight Words: Small Words with Great Power for English Language Learners

Dana Siegel

See. The. P-p-eople. The. People. A-a-are. Look-looking. At. The. S-s-school. How often have you listened to your students laboriously reading word by word, trying to sound out each and every sight word? Observing an English Language Learner (ELL) learn to read in English is always very exciting, but it can also be painful watching the student struggle and wrestle with the text. A lack of reading and writing fluency is not uncommon for English Language Learners who are just learning the sounds and rhythm of their new language. Unfortunately for many ELLs, opportunities to systematically learn sight words and build fluency are also uncommon. If we are looking to build speaking, reading and writing fluency, then teaching and learning sight words must be a regular component of any Beginning or Lower Intermediate Level student's ESL program.

Given the complexities of our English language, it is always rather surprising to read just how important and powerful the mastery of sight words is to becoming literate. While we have over a half-million words with which to communicate, about half of everything we read and write depends on only 0.02%, or 100, most frequent words, also known as sight words. If we add the next 100 most frequent words, that percentage shoots to 70%. Clearly, knowing sight words is critical to building fluency and comprehension. It is also important that these words be recognized automatically without the use of strategies such as decoding or searching for picture clues. Using such strategies for sight words is unproductive (try sounding out the word visualizing a picture of the word would), time consuming, and distracts the reader from the real goals of reading and writing- comprehending and communicating.

Because sight words are so critical for reading and writing fluency, explicitly teaching them needs to be a daily part of any ELL literacy program. With so much to teach, however, finding the time to do so is challenging. Luckily, explicit teaching of sight words and building mastery requires little time but has great impact on listening, speaking, reading and writing fluency.

When teaching sight words, it is important to remember and implement a few key points:

- Teach only a few words at a time, particularly with students who are learning the English alphabet.
- Provide multiple opportunities for repetition. More repetition is necessary for new readers learning these abstract words. It can take a reader with average cognitive abilities 35 or more exposures to fully master a new word. Try building a word wall and/or using a word bank to provide an organized system for review.
- Actively work with the new word. Write the word in the air, on the desk with a finger and on different surfaces. Use plastic letters to build and rebuild the word.

- Use the word in both reading and writing. Students should be able to read and write the word easily and automatically (without hesitation) in many different contexts.
- Remind students to remember the new word, to hold the new word in their head. Teach them to visualize the word and to “know” that they “know” that word (metacognition).
- Reward the student for recognizing and using the word in new contexts.

Once a bank of sight words has been mastered, try teaching sight word phrases such as all day long. This will help students embed the words in meaningful contexts and build language fluency. Teaching sight word phrases will also give your ELLs opportunities to see and hear how and which English words go together. Model how these phrases sound and provide repeated opportunities to hear, speak, read and write the phrases. Remember, these phrases are the building blocks of our English language and will go a long way to building fluency. For additional practice, include the new word phrases on the word wall or in the word bank.

To further extend sight word practice and mastery, locate and use easy beginner sight word texts that contain multiple repetitions of introduced sight words. Model how the reading should sound and then teach the students which words go together in phrases. Provide daily opportunities to write complete sentences using the sight words, dictating the sentences completely as a whole or in phrases and not word by word. Mark the reading and writing text to show students how words are grouped (underlining or highlighting phrases).

For a student who is really struggling with fluency, copy some lines of text on a sentence strip and cut the sentence(s) into phrases. When the student can successfully and fluently read in phrases, suggest that they further cut the phrase strips into words and reassemble the sentence in phrases. Play with the phrases to work on reading fluently as shown below:

Beginning fluency phrasing: *My class will run from here to there.*

More advanced phrasing: *My class will run from here to there.*

Based upon research on how our language works, teaching sight words is a powerful strategy to quickly build basic oral, reading, and writing fluency. Unfortunately, teaching and learning sight words can be tricky because they are usually not decodable or have meaning in and of themselves. Because of this, it is important to explicitly introduce sight words, teach strategies to memorize them, and then provide multiple practice opportunities for the students to read, write and say the new words. Taking sight words to the next level by teaching sight word phrases will further develop fluency and build meaning. When students can read and write sight words automatically, they are well on their way to becoming fluent readers and writers--not a bad outcome for mastering a lowly group of utility words!

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## Not Too Advanced to Sing: Songs in University ESL Classrooms

Martha Michieka

Research shows that a number of young people around the world embrace popular music, especially the American pop music, and for some, this music has become a means of acquiring English (Berns, De Bot, & Hasebrink, 2007; Huy, 1999). Can these songs be brought to university ESL classrooms as instructional tools? What is the rationale for using music in the classrooms? Are there any potential problems of using music, and how can these problems be addressed?

There are several reasons for using music in the classroom including use to reduce learner boredom, to communicate culture, to introduce slang and essential everyday vocabulary, to serve as authentic materials, and to bring about social harmony.

Most teachers use songs as a way of creating a good conducive atmosphere for language learning. Lems (2001) argues that music in the classroom can be used to “create a learning environment; to build listening comprehension, speaking, reading and writing skills; to increase vocabulary and to expand cultural knowledge” (p.1). Many students, including university ESL students, view songs as entertainment, listened to during leisure time. Whether this music is in or outside class, students will most likely “open up to it, and feel more relaxed in its presence” (Lems, 2005, p.15). And while they are enjoying the music, it is possible that that same ease they have memorizing particular melodies, might be transferred to language teaching (Mora, 2000).

Songs are a good channel for communication of culture. Many advanced ESL learners seek to understand the culture of their new environment. They are sensitive to the cultural differences, and they understand the importance of adapting and functioning well in communicative acts both linguistically and culturally. Listening to pop music will improve both their linguistic and cultural knowledge, and culture in the classroom will foster motivation by making the course content more interesting to the learner (McKay, 2000).

Advanced ESL students aspire to acquire idioms and everyday slang used by their peers. These learners may have proficient mastery of academic language but specialized usage in collocations, idioms and slang often introduce a whole new facet of knowledge (Huang, 2001). Songs, as Putnam (2006) states, “have natural pedagogical appeals because of their use of new vocabulary, slang phrases and linguistic constructions” (p. 69.) and will introduce learners to specialized usage of language.

Songs provide authentic materials for classroom use. Appropriately selected songs will not only introduce learners to the native speakers’ language, but the songs will also sensitize the learners about issues native speakers encounter everyday. As students become part of the campus culture, they will most likely enjoy more interaction in English and hence find time to practice the language. Increased interaction with peers is likely to

result in social harmony which, as Huy (1999) argues, acts as a motivational force and a tool for learning.

Although many teachers are aware of the power of songs to motivate, they are sometimes reluctant to use songs as a teaching technique in university settings. They see various challenges to doing so. Some of the challenges of using songs include the learners' attitudes, difficult content and the non-standard English nature of some songs.

Using songs in the classroom might violate students' long held beliefs of what teaching is and what it is not. If students view songs as mere entertainment, they might think that the teacher is wasting their time.

Songs and other authentic materials, because of their cultural content, might be difficult even for the advanced learners (Richards, 2001). Learners may be frustrated with their inability to understand the songs when they had thought they were relatively proficient. Unlike other forms of classroom instruction, songs do not provide any scaffolding for the learner since the artists do not target second language learners as their audience. Most artists, especially pop singers, might speak faster than most speakers that learners interact with. This problem can however be solved if songs are selected according to the level of the learners.

The other problem is that of non standard grammar in some of the songs, especially the popular songs. For advanced learners who have already mastered their grammar, this may not be a significant problem since most already understand the difference between formal and informal usage. For those learning the difference in register, songs may be a way of demonstrating informal use of language.

Some songs may not promote the values of the teacher or even other universally shared values and that may pose a problem. In a society that has become quite sensitive to personal freedoms, the question of what music should be selected will not be an issue to take lightly. However, if songs are treated as other genres of literature, then the same criteria for selecting literary texts in schools should apply to songs too.

The challenges discussed above can be eliminated through careful planning. Murray (2005) emphasizes that if language teachers decide to use songs in their curriculum, then they should take these songs seriously and make them an essential part of the curriculum. In her ten useful tips on how to successfully integrate music into one's classroom, she emphasizes the need for the instructor to ensure that songs do not become a mere accident that students stumble into on days when the teacher is not prepared (Murray 2006, p 162). Songs should be incorporated into the curriculum early in the semester and students should expect them. As songs become a regular feature of the curriculum and an essential part of learning, the students will need to be assured of how they will be evaluated.

Abbot (2002) advises that when choosing songs, the instructor should consider those songs that are popular with students and are age appropriate. Learners, even advanced ones, who are new in a culture, may not have any favorite songs in the target language, and it may be the responsibility of the instructor to connect them with the culture. These learners will appreciate learning the songs that their native speaker peers listen to. If there are popular singers in the area, it may be a good idea to ask students to research

those artists and then move into listening to their songs. Whenever artists are invited to perform on college campuses or in local community events, ESL learners will benefit by being introduced to these artists and their songs and, if possible, be encouraged to attend concerts.

The appropriateness of the song in relation to the intended goals for the learners should be considered. If the goal is to generate discussion, then the song(s) should have important themes that can be discussed. Although silly songs can be used in class especially when the goal is to practice with specific sounds, these silly songs may not be the best conversation starters for intellectually motivating conversations.

The choice of songs will also be influenced by the availability of resources and the talents in the classroom (Abbott, 2002). If the songs selected are only available on tapes and there is no tape player available, the instructor may consider using the technology that is available. If students reach a comfort level that they can actually perform, then their talent can be used to make the classes livelier. Those who can play musical instruments can be asked to bring their instruments and play while the rest of the class sings along.

By following a simple lesson plan, teachers can assure that songs are used as effective techniques. A sample plan follows.

Goal: Discussion motivators for advanced learners

- Choose a song that has an important theme for the learners. Tell the students the goals of the lesson.
- Play the song through once; let the students discuss what they think the song is about. Be patient at this point because answers might differ widely depending on listening ability.
- Play the song the second time. Pause and see if there can be a consensus on the general meaning of the song. Those who had missed it the first time will most likely get it this second time.
- If you want the students to write the lyrics, play the song a few more times pausing at the end of every line so they can write what they hear. Otherwise, you could also give them already prepared lyrics.
- Analyze the lyrics like you could a poem. Ask lower level and higher level thinking questions .What does the artist mean by these words? Ask the students if they can relate with the artist.
- If you have more time, you can play the song again and this time the class can sing along.
- Ask volunteers to bring musical instruments to play the song during the next class and the rest can sing along.

With careful planning, songs can be used to change a classroom environment and offer several advantages both for the learner and the instructor. Advanced learners will especially benefit from the authentic materials that introduce culturally based language. Understanding the culture associated with a given language will make for successful communication acts and language learners are likely to be more motivated by language teaching practices that incorporate such knowledge.

### The Author

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## Clustering: An Effective Practice in ESL Teaching

Betty Thomason

Many districts face the challenge of having only a few students in many schools spread out over a large county. Maryville College, serving Blount County and Maryville City, is one such district. Blount County is a large rural county in Tennessee where Maryville College serves approximately twenty-five schools. Some schools have only three or four ESL students and some have up to thirty students. The schools of this district have chosen to bring the students by bus to a central location in what is termed a "cluster" arrangement. In such an arrangement, the high school students come to the central location for a regular fourth block class and receive a high school credit in ESL English, and the elementary students gather at the cluster school during the language arts time in their mainstream schools.

Each teacher at a cluster school has a class of ten to twelve students and instructs them for approximately two hours per day. With this amount of instruction time, each teacher is able to assess the needs of each student accurately and is able to use a CALLA-based curriculum to fulfill these needs. CALLA, or the Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach, integrates instruction in the content areas with the development of language skills and the use of learning strategies. Teachers at Maryville College have found that clustering the students in one school enables them to effectively implement a content-based curriculum.

Besides having the ability to use CALLA-based instruction in the ESL classroom, clustering benefits the teachers and students by offering a more flexible instructional model. The students are placed into classes according to their English Language Development Assessment, or ELDA, scores. Grouping the students according to ability and grade level insures that each student will be placed in a class where the instruction is at a level that is a little beyond their current level of competence. Because of the level of flexibility that clustering offers, students are allowed to progress at their own paces, and if a student progresses faster than others in his class, he is able to move to a higher level with more challenging material. Clustering also allows teachers to share material and reduces redundancy in purchasing.

Another benefit of clustering is the emotional safety that it provides for students to practice English. For many high school students, having a place where English can be practiced without the fear of humiliation from more advanced students or native language speakers is very important. According to Stephen Krashen's Affective Filter Theory, an individual's emotions can interfere or assist with the learning of new information. Krashen says that speaking a new language can result in anxiety, embarrassment, and anger and that these negative emotions can block the learner's ability to process new information. The clustering not only allows beginner and intermediate speakers the opportunity to practice their skills free from humiliation, but it allows students from the same language background who attend different schools to form relationships. Often, ESL students feel lonely and intimidated by native speakers and do not form relation-

ships with them. This can slow the acquisition of oral skills. Clustering allows the Maryville College program to support academic proficiency because teachers are able to use CALLA-based instruction and can give students an emotionally safe environment in which to learn. Clustering has enabled the program to become efficient and effective, and it has aided the district in meeting all Annual Measureable Achievement Objectives (AMAOs), including annual yearly progress.

Many ESL teachers state that they cannot support academic proficiency for their ESL students because of the instructional model chosen by their school districts. Often because the students are spread out in several different schools, the ESL instructor is reduced to tutoring students on an individual basis for short amounts of time. When the ESL instructor is reduced to tutoring, he/she usually attempts to help the student with work from his/her mainstream classroom and is not able to use appropriate content-based curriculum. If schools have only one or two ESL students and the ESL instructor must travel from school to school in a tutor-type arrangement, it is impossible for the instructor to use an ESL appropriate curriculum. Research has shown that while the average ESL student can become conversationally fluent within two to five years, developing fluency in technical academic language can take from four to seven years depending on many variables including the degree of support given for academic proficiency. Some studies have suggested that in schools where there is "high implementation" of CALLA, the students perform significantly better than in schools where low implementation is used. Students who do not receive appropriate CALLA instruction may take longer to develop proficiency and thus increase the number of years that they must remain in ESL.

Because of the No Child Left Behind program, ESL has garnered much attention, particularly in regards to the number of years of instruction needed to adequately equip a student for mainstream academics. Many studies have shown that content-based or CALLA-based instruction is a very valuable tool for ESL teachers because it introduces material into the context of the student's daily life. CALLA, a program model based on cognitive learning theory for ELLs, integrates content-based instruction with explicit language development. One of the reasons that the Maryville College program has been very successful in preparing students for success in the mainstream classroom is the clustering model, which allows ESL teachers to use content-based instruction. While there are drawbacks to the clustering, such as thirty-minute bus rides and limited relationships with classroom teachers, clustering is an efficient method of teaching ELLs when they are scattered in many schools.

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## Newcomer Programs: Helping Recent Immigrants Succeed in U.S.

Wendy Wilson

Judy Edwards is one of those teachers who never fail to praise students after a job well done. “Good job!” she’ll say. “Kiss your brain!” With that, students mimic her gestures as she brings two fingers to her lips and then to her forehead. On an April morning earlier this year, Edwards was busy helping her students at the International Newcomer Academy in Nashville with vowel sounds and ordering events with first, next and last. Edwards is a veteran teacher. Still, she was daunted by the job ahead of her when the newcomer academy opened in November 2007. Unaccustomed to life in the U.S. and formal schooling, students were thoroughly dependent on her. “The first few weeks, I thought I couldn’t do it,” she recalled (personal communication, April 5, 2008). Most of her 19 students, who ranged in age from 6 to 11, were refugees from Somalia, Burundi and Burma, now known as Myanmar, and started school in the U.S. without having literacy skills even in their own language. But Edwards grew amazed at how quickly they learned basic English and school routines. On that April morning, Edwards found many times to tell students to kiss their brains as they recited the Pledge of Allegiance by heart and followed instructions during lessons without needing much extra help. “When you think of how far they’ve come, it’s remarkable,” Edwards said.

Newcomer programs are becoming more common as more students with zero English skills and little or no educational background continue to enroll in U.S. schools, including an increasing number across Tennessee. Students typically stay in such programs for about year, after which they move to their zoned school, or, as will happen in Nashville, to an ESL cluster school. The challenges to starting a newcomer program are many, from finding a location to hiring qualified staff to developing a curriculum to providing transportation for students. But many educators believe it is worth the effort if they can better address newcomers’ needs and alleviate the burden on mainstream teachers and ESL teachers working with more advanced students.

Next door to Edwards at the Nashville school was Cheryl Jolley, who taught 15 children ages 11 to 17. Being with the same students all day long helped her bond with them, she said. “You really get to know them” (personal communication, April 5, 2008). A creative and resourceful teacher, Jolly had students make a quilt for a math lesson earlier in the year, giving each student a turn on a sewing machine. Students practiced their measuring skills by measuring the quilt blocks. The quilt now hangs in the hallway outside the classroom.

Educators for Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools were lucky when it came to a location for the newcomer academy. Offices for the ELL department needed to be moved because of deteriorating, cramped conditions. Plans were drafted to house both the ELL department and the newcomer academy in a former district warehouse. Remodeling was still under way at the start of the school year, so the newcomer students started the year at other schools and came to the academy in November when the building was

ready. The space for the newcomer academy includes two classrooms, a small cafeteria and an open area for music, indoor P.E. and other activities.

The Nashville academy has attracted the attention of other Tennessee districts interested in starting similar programs. Among those turning to Nashville educators for advice were officials for Knox County Schools. "We just can't take refugee children out of a tent and put them in Public Classroom USA and expect them to be successful," Principal Roy Miller of Mooreland Heights Elementary School told the Knoxville News Sentinel. Miller began a "transition class" for newcomers that he hoped would become a model for a district-wide program. The transition class allowed teachers to tailor instruction and work through cultural and language issues that were causing behavior problems (Alapo, 2007). Williamson County Schools south of Nashville will start a pilot newcomer program at Centennial High School in Franklin in August 2008. Because the district has a smaller ESL population and fewer refugee students than districts like Metro Nashville, the criteria for entering the program will be different. Students may have literacy skills in their own language, for example, and even minimal English skills. But even those students need a lot of help, said Kevin Stacy, an ESL teacher at Centennial who wants to encourage students to take their education into their own hands (personal communication, April 20, 2008). Students, many of whom will be native Spanish speakers, will learn study skills such as how to examine pictures and topic sentences in textbooks to grasp main ideas. They also will learn how to talk to mainstream teachers about what they are and are not able to do and how to ask for extra help. The pilot program will include only students zoned for Centennial, but school leaders would like to expand the program later to include students district-wide, as well as a parent resource center.

While entrance criteria and program design may vary, many reasons for starting newcomer programs are similar nationwide. According to the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL), those reasons include the need to help students at risk of failing or dropping out, the need to find a place for students who are over age for their grade level and the need to develop an instructional approach that will help students who cannot benefit from instruction in more traditional settings (Center for Applied Linguistics, 2003).

Many who have started newcomer programs or are in the planning stages have combed through data collected by CAL and posted on its Web site at [www.cal.org](http://www.cal.org). The site features a portion of a report on a 4-year research project, "Newcomers: Language and Academic Programs for Recent Immigrants" begun in 1996 and sponsored by the National Center for Research on Education, Diversity & Excellence (CREDE) at the University of California, Santa Cruz. The report includes profiles of 115 secondary newcomer programs nationwide. Many of the programs began in the 1990s, reflecting the growth of the newcomer population. While many of those profiled are in California, Texas, New Jersey and New York, other states are represented as well, underscoring the need for such programs across the country. The report notes that the programs profiled are not the only ones operating.

One concern sometimes raised about newcomer programs is the limited interaction students might have with American students as a result of being a separate school or a school within a school. That was one of the worries in Louisville, Kentucky, when educators started a newcomer program at Shawnee High School in 2006. But instructional coach Scott Beldon said those worries lessened when people saw the advantages of

“creating a learning environment that encourages risk-taking with language and provides students with a solid foundation of English in all content areas” (personal communication, April 16, 2008). Many programs do as much as they can to expose students to American culture in creative ways. Students at the Nashville academy have taken field trips to a bowling alley, roller skating rink and the zoo. Watching students as they become acquainted with aspects of American culture is one of the joys for the teachers at the Nashville school. Edwards was tickled to see how students reacted to a drinking fountain, which they had never seen before. Jolley remembers when students were given Popsicles. Dazzled by the frosty treat, they eagerly snapped them up.

Getting the Nashville school started took effort, but was not as difficult as many might think, said Dr. LaWanna Shelton, the district’s ELL coordinator. She raised the idea for the school in February, less than a year before the school opened in November. Shelton said showing others why the school was needed, and being flexible, helped her move her plans along. “I wasn’t going into this with any demands,” she said. She simply asked others what they could do to help make it happen. “Once we described the need, everybody was on board” (personal communication, April 5, 2008). Besides resolving the issue of where to house the program, school officials had to find a way to provide transportation for students living across the district. Shelton worked that out with the transportation department by agreeing to have the school day from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., enabling the bus drivers to add the new bus routes. Shelton would like to expand the newcomer program and is confident that her plans will be realized. She believes other educators should have the same attitude in their own districts. “Just get in there and show them that it can work.”

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## Book Review

### *Leadership in English Language Teaching*

Coombe, C., McCloskey, M.L., Stephenson, L., & Anderson, N. (Eds.). Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2008. Pp. vi + 237.

Deborah Sams

Leadership scholars agree that individuals are not born leaders; rather, leadership includes a set of skills that can be learned and developed over time. This volume shares specific leadership skills for English language teachers in diverse contexts situated in the TESOL field. Thirty-five leaders from across the TESOL spectrum contribute chapters--a rich collaboration that provides a resource in leadership development specific to English language teachers. Serving in diverse capacities of the TESOL field, these leaders share expertise and explain skills necessary to lead successful classes, projects, teams, groups, and organizations.

Starting with general theory and then continuing to specialized contexts and skills, the chapters in *Leadership in English Language Teaching* offer something for everyone, from K-12 ESL teachers to affiliate presidents. The book is divided into five parts: theoretical, interpersonal and communication strategies, personal organizational skills and strategies, program organizational skills and strategies, and leadership on the part of ESL teachers in U.S. public schools. In a single volume, highly reputed chapter authors share leadership beliefs and practices, and explicitly detail skills that have been honed from years of experience in the ESL field.

In the first part of *Leadership in English Language Teaching and Learning*, Stephenson and Anderson provide theoretical background and frame the issues of leadership for subsequent chapters in the book. Noting that everyone has leadership potential, Laurie Stephenson presents leading theories while suggesting that distributed, leadership, due to its central focus on people, is ideal for the field of English language teaching. Neil Anderson explains leadership development for groups and organizations by comparing the vision offered by four scopes: a telescope, a microscope, a gyroscope, and a kaleidoscope. Through these views, Anderson presents tools for setting goals and strategic planning which should be mandatory reading for organizational and affiliate leaders in the field of English language teaching.

Part two contains four chapters on interpersonal and communication strategies, crucial skills for leaders in English language teaching. Expressing encouragement and approval to others is a leadership strategy that motivates anyone, but many leaders forget to employ it. In chapter three, Kathleen Bailey illustrates how affirmation can uncover talent and abilities in others, prevent burnout, and lead to deeper fulfillment in work and the profession itself. Although chapter four focuses on mentoring from a non-native speaker perspective, Kamhi-Stein and Oliveira's recommendations are appropriate for anyone and prove that mentoring is a crucial practice on the road to leadership. While TESOL

professionals teach effective communication, some may wish for more expertise when speaking in front of peers and larger groups. With chapter five, Coombe, England and Schmidt teach indispensable skills for public speaking and presentations. Focusing on principles of effective communication, these TESOL leaders recommend how to develop a speech, 'dos and don'ts' regarding speech support, oral delivery skills, potential problems, and other insight gained through experience. In chapter six, Mary Lou McCloskey affirms that effective meetings are the cornerstone of leadership for any group or organization, outlining skills for leading group meetings in three phases: pre-planning, during the meeting, and follow-up after the meeting. The information provided in this chapter will steer groups in streamlined, efficacious meetings, a crucial factor in group leadership.

Part three of *Leadership in English Language Teaching and Learning* concentrates on personal organizational skills and strategies necessary for English language teachers who want life to flow more smoothly by maximizing personal resources such as time, schedules, and responsibilities. In chapter seven, Murphey and Brogan share nine strategies for time management, including positive ways to decline invitations for collaborative work due to time constraints. Tenure can be a nebulous, uncertain construct to those who are new to higher education work contexts. Taylor, Sobel, and Al-Hamly explain tenure, its history, and how to achieve it by maneuvering through academic institutions, research agendas, collaboration, social support, and the inherent pressures of coping with institutional demands while balancing multiple projects. This chapter is especially helpful in organizing projects required for seeking tenure and provides examples of forms used to track research and record writing logistics. Finally, Algren, Dwyer, Eggington, and Witt handle the white knuckle topic "So, You Have Agreed to Chair a Conference!" with a skillful and humorous writing style. Affirming that hosting conferences is a vital leadership responsibility that benefits colleagues, the authors offer advice on designing and co-coordinating successful conferences and even smaller events.

Part four of the book targets program organizational skills and strategies for leaders. Andy Curtis articulates the importance of establishing a professional development program and seven principles to guide leaders in planning future activities. In chapter eleven, Christison and Murray relate two primary leadership concerns: strategic planning and implementation. This chapter is particularly important for it offers many tools for accomplishing organizational goals: vision statements, mission statements, value statements, determining goals and objectives, and a SWOT Analysis instrument. In chapter twelve, noting that computer and technology skills are a must for today's leaders, Siskin and Reynolds provide a checklist with the essential technical skills they feel are required of English language teachers today. Brady provides basic principles of fundraising in chapter thirteen, along with guidelines for raising funds to benefit groups and organizations. In an outstanding chapter, Currie and Gilroy explain five key principles for recruiting appropriate, skilled personnel who are essential for meeting an institution's goals. Next, Panferov addresses a primary challenge for English language program directors: recruiting new students through effective program promotion. Explaining current promotional campaigns, Panferov also proposes steps for creating an effective plan through research, marketing, creativity, and networking. Quirke and Allison's chapter ends part four with the Dream model, a leadership framework designed for their institution incorporating best leadership practices for English language teachers in a college community. By telling the words behind the DREAM acronym, the authors also reveal the leadership formula utilized by their institution for the past five years.

A timely section, part five focuses on English language teaching and leadership found in the context of U.S. public schools. If there were any question that public school ESL teachers are leaders, the answer is found in this chapter for Carnuccio, Huffman, O'Loughlin, and Rosenthal state the need for teacher leadership now, especially in low-incidence settings. The authors of this chapter not only describe the situation with ELLs in school systems and the multiple roles of ESL educators, but also urge us all to be teacher leaders. They detail how to advocate effectively and how to exert influence and leadership in schools for the benefit of English learners. The final chapter details how a large metropolitan school system responds to linguistic and cultural diversity on a grand scale. The article takes place in Gwinnett County Public Schools in Atlanta, Georgia, and is expressed from a superintendent's point of view. The article contains interesting statistics and ideas with a systemic approach via intensive teacher training, the education of classroom teachers and staff, and parental involvement.

An important resource, there are many positive aspects to this volume. First, chapter authors are highly reputed in the field, so one anticipates each page and chapter. The writing styles are crisp, informative, and interesting to read. Since chapters average ten pages each, they can be read quickly, subsequently allowing the reader to digest and learn leadership strategies to incorporate into their own practices. A great strength to this volume is the universal application of each chapter to the reader, despite individual and diverse work contexts. For example, Currie and Gilroy's chapter on recruiting is situated within the context of higher education, yet the principles could easily translate to a public school ESL department considering applicants for positions within their own department. Chapters end with discussion questions which invite readers to review the material and relate it to their experiences and realities. References and additional resources offer the opportunity to pursue additional reading and further leadership development through independent study.

Until recently, few articles or publications have focused directly on leadership for English language teachers; hence, this book should prove quite valuable for the knowledge that it imparts to the reader. As an English language professional studying leadership theory, it is exhilarating to see a volume devoted to this topic in our field. A valuable book for every English language department and professional library, it is an essential resource for English language teachers throughout the world. Hot off the press, *Leadership in English Language Teaching* addresses many challenges in the TESOL field, while sharing invaluable leadership skills, strategies, and resources for teacher leaders everywhere.

### **The Author**

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